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My View: Julian L. Alssid and Carol D'Amico

## Creating pathways to careers for low-wage workers

As the U.S. economy continues to lose steam, the remaining presidential candidates are focused on what can be done to get it moving again. Offering help to Americans who are about to lose their homes, ensuring that unemployed Americans receive extra help during an economic downturn, and the economic stimulus checks that will soon be arriving in our mailboxes are all worthy actions to bring a measure of economic security to millions of Americans.

Yet they are short-term fixes to a larger, underlying problem, especially in the Midwest. We need a president who is committed to one of the most important challenges facing our economy long-term: How do we educate and train a work force that has been left behind in the global economy?

According to Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, by 2014 the number of American jobs requiring some form of postsecondary training or education will grow 60 percent faster than the job market as a whole.

According to a recent Indiana Chamber of Commerce report, 24 percent of working adults in Indiana do not have the education or training to succeed in a knowledge-based economy. The report also found that 12 percent of Indiana residents have not finished high school and the state ranks 41st among the 50 states in the percentage of working-age adults with an associate's degree or higher.

The encouraging news is that leaders are stepping up to the challenge. Policymakers in Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin have launched "Shifting Gears," an initiative funded by The Joyce Foundation designed to reorganize Midwest adult education to create "pathways" to college and career for the region's low-wage workers.

This initiative awarded \$1 million to a partnership of the Ivy Tech Community College, the Indiana Department of Workforce Development and the Indiana Chamber of Commerce to improve community college programs to ensure that students entering vocational training programs also strengthen basic skills and literacy rates.

One key component to moving workers into knowledge jobs that pay family-supporting wages is to first determine which local industries are in need of skilled workers and then train and educate the workers to fill those jobs.

To meet this challenge, the partnership has established an Accelerated College for Working Adults that focuses on training workers to fill high-skill positions in six local industries. All three partners have worked together to design courses that will arm students with the appropriate skills and education to succeed in these targeted industries.

This country needs a comprehensive work-force development policy that focuses on ensuring that all our citizens have access to postsecondary education and training. The next president would be wise to follow the example of states like Indiana that are at the forefront of implementing smart, creative approaches to a complex issue.