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Time to Get Serious About Workforce Development

We are at the cusp of historic growth in the region, due in part to Tesla's announcement to expand here, but even more as a result of the more than 60 additional new companies that have relocated to the region over the past few years. Add to this, the scores of additional companies we are working with, many that have already decided to come here, as well as the countless local companies that are expanding. The projections are staggering, that more than 50,000 new jobs will be added to this region in the next five years. This is a 25% increase in employment, but with far less than 50,000 available workers in the region, it is time to get serious about workforce attraction and development.

Workforce "attraction" is simply attracting talent to the region to help meet the needs of the employers in the area now, and in the near future.. With a significant percentage of our job opportunities in the advanced manufacturing sector there are several things we can do "now" to get in front of this challenge.

There is little doubt that the needs of Tesla will be met, as there are employees across the country that would be excited to work for a company like Tesla. We must consider the needs of the many other manufacturing companies in the area and market our region as the "manufacturing hub of the West", using the surge of manufacturing growth in the region as our proof. In promoting this region as a manufacturing hub, a developing technology center (with data center additions like Apple and Switch) and a growing and vibrant economy, we will attract talent across all disciplines to the region in search of a quality job in an up-and-coming economy.

However, to be truly effective at attracting talent, especially in the technology sector, we must ensure that the millennials and the creative class find our region welcoming and attractive. There are certain things that are important to these employees and we are fortunate to have many of these qualities already; a great outdoor environment, an exciting arts and culture scene, countless events and activities, a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem and an increasing number of great restaurants. Yet there is more work to be done. We must continue to revitalize our downtown and engage and promote the College Town atmosphere that will make us "the cool place to be" in the years ahead.

In addition to attracting talent to meet the coming job opportunities, we must also "develop" our existing workforce. Workforce development is best thought of in two ways, the near term and the long term.

To develop our workforce in the near term is more about training and skill upgrading. We have dozens of local and state organizations that are already ramping up for this increasing demand. Truckee Meadows Community College is the largest of these training providers and has significantly improved their programs to more closely align

them with the growing needs of the manufacturing and technology sectors. Funding is a concern, but one that has been identified and is being addressed.

In the long term, the workforce development rests in large part with our K-12 education system. Increasing the high school graduation rate and adding an emphasis on Science Technology, Engineering and Math programs (STEM) or STEAM if you add the Arts, is a start. Most of these new jobs will require more than a high school degree. A two year degree or a certification is essential if the next generation wants access to the quality jobs that are coming available. Most of these advanced manufacturing jobs will pay over \$60,000 a year.

So the window of opportunity is open and it's time to get serious about workforce attraction and development. It is exciting to be dealing with the prospect that we may have more great jobs than currently available workforce! We are experiencing a once in a lifetime transition that is reinventing the Reno-Sparks economy and bringing a vibrancy and a vitality to our region that we could only dream of just a few short years ago.