



Laura Beeth and Connie Ireland of the Governor's Workforce Development Council

Greater collaboration essential to maintaining Minnesota's quality workforce

A Civic Caucus Focus on Human Capital Interview

May 27, 2015

Present

Laura Beeth; David Broden; Paul Gilje, executive director; Randy Johnson (phone); Connie Ireland; Sallie Kemper, associate director (phone); Dan Loritz, chair; Paul Ostrow (phone); Dana Schroeder, associate director; and Clarence Shallbetter (phone).

Summary

In a Civic Caucus interview with Laura Beeth and Connie Ireland of the Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Council the following key points were discussed:

(1) Living wage jobs now require much closer ties among education, business, and workforce so that workers have the opportunities for jobs with future career pathways. Successful ties will require that educators, employers and others create closer partnerships than they have had in the past. A single statewide partnership and vision is important but not sufficient to implement strategies across the state. Partnerships must occur at the level of economic regions and localities within the state.

(2) Students' education cannot occur in isolation. More education is needed in collaboration with employers, not just in the classroom. Thus, hands-on exposure to the world of work along with actual employment is essential during E-12 and postsecondary years.

(3) The state can't afford to ignore a demographic certainty that the number of people of working age will stop growing and possibly decline in fewer than five years. Consequently, to assure enough

qualified workers to fill job openings, Minnesota must vastly improve education and skills training for traditionally underserved and under-represented populations, including minorities, native peoples, the disabled, and correctional inmates.

Biographies

Laura Beeth has over 25 years of experience holding system leadership positions in talent acquisition, talent management, and workforce development at Fairview Health Services.

In July 2014, Beeth was appointed board chair of the Governor's Workforce Development Council. She served as a business representative on the Council from 2004-2014, chairing the health care primary care report, co-chairing the career pathways and serving on sector strategies and P-16 committees.

Beeth is state chair of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Healthcare Education-Industry Partnership Council. Recently, she received the 2015 Health Care Workforce Champion "Individual Leader Award" from the Minnesota Hospital Association. In 2004 she received the inaugural Minnesota Vision Award for Workforce Development.

Connie Ireland has been the executive director for Minnesota's Governor's Workforce Development Council since November 2013. Ireland has well over twenty years of experience in the public and non-profit sector. Her background includes extensive financial and developmental efforts in affordable housing, community development, broadband, and economic development.

During her tenure at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, she held a number of positions in community and economic development, broadband development, small business export program director, and workforce development. Ireland directed special projects during her tenure with Minnesota Technology, now Enterprise Minnesota, which included statewide workforce development for the manufacturing sector and broadband development.

Background

The Civic Caucus in a January 2015 [statement](#) offered recommendations for maintaining a high-quality workforce in Minnesota. Today's interview focuses on the leadership role the Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Council (GWDC) has played and will continue to play in maintaining the state's workforce numbers and quality.

Discussion

Minnesota is facing significant workforce challenges. Beeth and Ireland highlighted key findings in a recent [report](#) from the Governors Workforce Development Council (GWDC):

- **Workforce growth is dwindling.** By 2020 workforce growth in Minnesota will slow to nearly zero, fueled by baby boomer retirements. More than 620,000 jobs requiring postsecondary credentials will be vacated and must be filled.

- **Better pathways for minorities are essential.** Between 2000 and 2010 minorities accounted for more than 80 percent of the state's population growth. Within about 25 years, minority groups in the state will represent more than one-half the state's population. The state will be incapable of maintaining its highly respected workforce without much more significant involvement of its minorities.
- **Workforces must become more productive.** Without growth in productivity, economic growth will slow down. Central to increasing productivity will be to increase skills of Minnesotans, particularly those who have been marginalized. High school graduation rates for minority students are far below those of white students, according to [data](#) from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education.

Employers need more job applicants.

Some 68 percent of employers reported too few applicants for job openings in a recent [survey](#), according to the GWDC.

Opportunities are emerging prompted by federal legislation. The GWDC was created in 2001 as a result of federal legislation; it has been federally financed to date and will be implementing new federal law, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. GWDC currently has a staff of 2 ½ employees, but relies on numerous state staff across several agencies to fulfill the statutory requirements for state boards under the law.

Broad involvement across systems and geographically is essential. Beeth and Ireland said a key part of future workforce strategies is broad involvement of (1) educators at all age levels, in government, non-profit, and for profit institutions, (2) employers of all types, (3) employer and organized labor organizations, (4) economic development organizations, and (5) organizations offering workforce programs.

Strategies for individual regions within each state, involving all parties within those regions, must be undertaken, they stressed. A single strategy for the state won't work because Minnesota has several regional economies that are dependent on different industry sectors, such as mining in the Northeast and agriculture in the Southwest.

Beeth and Ireland cited four federally-backed enhancements that states, regions and localities should make to strengthen their workforces:

- Deeper coordination and alignment across systems and within economic regions on strategic planning, service delivery, and performance management.
- Innovation in how services are delivered, including career pathways and experiential (work-based) learning.
- Increased engagement and partnerships with industry to identify employer needs with opportunities to develop and deliver training resulting in industry-recognized credentials.
- Flexibility in programmatic funding at all levels to better meet the needs of individuals.

GWDC attaches high priority to career pathways and experiential learning. "Career pathways" are connected education and training programs, work experiences and student support services that enable individuals to secure a job or advance in a demand industry or occupation. "Experiential learning" help students gain skills by carrying out and reflecting upon activities in a real-world context, often in collaboration with an employer.

A GWDC survey revealed about 100 career pathways and experiential learning activities throughout the state. All are discussed in a GWDC  report that also highlights a new GWDC tool, "Net Impact Framework". This framework looks at outcomes of program participants compared against a control group of similar nonparticipants. The framework is designed to increase transparency and accountability of public investment in workforce development and to demonstrate value of such investment for participants and the general public, Beeth and Ireland said. The characteristics of a "career pathways" approach include:

- Collaboration among employers, education providers at E-12, postsecondary and adult basic education levels, and workforce development and community-based organizations.
- Alignment of resources, building shared capacity, and combining services to produce better outcomes.

At least 11 states are exploring or have adopted this approach, Beeth and Ireland said. One successful "career pathways" approach in Minnesota is [Minnesota FastTRAC](#), which helps low-skilled adults.

Changes are coming as a result of federal law. More "career pathways" initiatives are in early stages, they said, given that new federal law is requiring changes in the GWDC, including changes in its membership. Federal law requires a majority of private sector members. Today 6 of 31 members of the GWDC board represent employers. In the new board, 21 of 41 members will represent employers and there will be 12 non-voting members.

With the passage of WIOA, the GWDC will experience numerous changes including the addition of several new roles and responsibilities. The law addresses the importance of the state board including its membership and their role in advising the Governor on the state's workforce systems. For Minnesota, this will represent a major change as the board will be represented by 21 industry leaders from Minnesota's key industry sectors. This leadership adjustment is expected to assist in driving changes in our workforce system to better meet the demands of our growing sectors. The new board also brings cross-agency state leadership to better align programming and funding.

Minnesota is participating with the National Governors Association (NGA) in a Talent Pipeline Policy Academy. Ireland stressed that the GWDC is working closely with the NGA on aligning education and training with the needs of the economy. Fourteen states will participate in a cross-state session with NGA on this topic in Minneapolis June 22-23.

GWDC helping to address shortage of health care workers in Minnesota. To help illustrate the work of GWDC, Beeth outlined its impact in health care. She cited 1,100 current vacancies in Fairview Health Services, where she serves as system director of talent acquisition (workforce development, recruitment, provider recruitment, academic partnerships/clinical coordination,

contingent workforce, and job transition). A report by GWDC in 2011 identified goals and strategies for easing shortages in physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants.

Workforce centers throughout Minnesota provide important employment assistance.

Minnesota's 48 workforce centers, funded primarily by federal dollars, provide one-stop locations for job seekers and employers. The GWDC reports that in the year ending June 30, 2013:

- More than 92,000 job seekers found work within 90 days of their last service, with an average yearly wage of more than \$29,000.
- More than 347,000 job openings were posted, along with 114,000 new job seeker accounts and 1,900 new employer accounts.

It is important to address industry-specific sectors. Asked about "career pathways" and "experiential learning" in specific industry sectors, Ireland said that a sector partnership is an industry specific regional effort led by business in partnership with economic development, education, and workforce development. The Colorado Workforce Development Council reports that nationally businesses in sector partnerships experience 41 percent reduction in turnover and 84 percent of these businesses report significant increases in productivity.

Pathways must keep pace with employers' changing needs. An interviewer expressed the hope that "career pathways" will recognize that job requirements change frequently. Consequently, it is important that "career pathways" be structured so that such changes can be reflected regularly in education and training provided to job-seekers. Ireland replied that she is confident "career pathways" models will result in strategies that better meet employers' needs.

U.S. Chamber of Commerce initiative will be helpful. Responding to a question, Ireland expressed support for [a new effort by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) for employers to be more specific about job qualifications and to identify those education and training institutions that are doing the best job of satisfying the qualifications.

There is an enormous challenge in meeting the need for health care workers. Beeth said "career pathways" are urgently needed in health care. She noted a national [Institute of Medicine \(IOM\) effort](#) to recommend a baccalaureate degree in nursing for 80 per cent of all nurses by 2020. About one-half of nurses have such degrees today. "Degree creep" is widespread in professional health care positions due to the complexity of clinical roles, responsibilities, and quality standards, she said. Another challenge is that Minnesota lacks enough primary care doctors, she said. Workforce planning strategies are underway to address shortages for primary care providers including doctors, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants.

Greater diversity is needed in health care and other fields. Beeth noted that Fairview Health Services has a major presence in the Cedar-Riverside area of Minneapolis, which also is the location of a very high population of immigrant people of color. The area is well situated for education with the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College nearby and for transportation to Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Saint Paul College, with two LRT lines. This area offers great opportunities for individuals to obtain an education while working in entry level jobs with potential to lead to longer-term, living wage jobs as education is obtained. The Central Corridor Fellows (C3F) is

a partnership program connecting college health care students to health care organizations, like Fairview, located on the Green Line.

Apprenticeships will continue to play an important role. An interviewer noted that the Civic Caucus interviewed representatives of Bühler, Inc., recently about its apprenticeship program. Ireland responded by noting the major role played by the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry in supporting the development of apprenticeships in the state.

GWDC is fully aware of the projected absolute shortage of workers. Commenting on demographers' projections of zero growth or possibly even an absolute decline in people of working age in Minnesota, Ireland said the situation will be eased considerably if we collectively consider opportunities for employing those individuals with the most significant employment barriers:

- Individuals with disabilities
- Underemployed and long-term unemployed
- Members of tribal nations
- People of color and other minorities
- Former felons
- Veterans
- Disadvantaged youth

The state must find ways to address transportation and housing needs. Ireland said providing better alignment and opportunities through "career pathways" won't be sufficient. In addition, statewide, we need to find better ways to help people get to and from work, because a job isn't really available if a person can't get there. The need for affordable housing within a reasonable distance of available jobs is also critical. Both transportation and housing deficits must be addressed for individuals to take advantage of opportunities to earn livable wages and ultimately succeed as productive citizens.