

Improving Growth by Closing the Skills Gap

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In order to grow GDP in the United States, we've got to grow the workforce and we've got to grow productivity. Workforce development is critical to both of us, either by helping workers, potential workers on the sideline get trained and get back into the workforce or by helping existing workers increase their skills so they can take a more productive job and earn a greater income in the 11th District. In my district, we do surveys of business leaders, and they tell us regularly that they have more openings for skilled workers than there is supply. What are examples? Pipefitters, automotive technicians? Um, construction trades, registered nurses. There's a long list. If you take those local reports that we each that we get in our district and other districts and you broaden that to the nation. Our judgment is there's a substantial skills gap. I think one of the big challenges of workforce development and the skills gap is while it's a national issue, the solutions need to be local. This is one of those initiatives that if you're waiting for the government to solve and address this problem, either the federal government, the state government or local government you can stop waiting. It's not going to happen. You have to take the initiative and work with leaders to try to address these issues. So business leaders need to first survey what they're open positions are, Uh, and if there's skills, gaps they're seen in the local market, what are they? They then need to approach either local elected officials, workforce development board and educational institutions and talk about whether there are opportunities to partner either in an existing program or create a new program to create training for those types of positions. Normally, when businesses do this, what they learn is there's many other similar businesses in their community that have similar needs that aren't being filled. And, uh, and they could be even more influential with a local junior college or high school or college to provide those programs because it means the college knows. Or the high school knows they have a much greater chance to get more students in, and that there's a demand for those positions.