

# Express Q&A: Jobs-training advocate

Conversations with people who help define Manchester

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When she's not working as president of the Manchester Community College to train students for jobs the local economy demands, Darlene Miller is advocating for workforce training development as part of The Workforce Alliance's Leadership Priorities Council. Miller was in Washington recently for a national meeting and to push the 111th Congress to pass new legislation that advances the council's cause. The Express caught up with Miller to find out how her efforts affect Manchester.

## What is The Workforce Alliance?

The Workforce Alliance is a coalition of workforce development professionals — people from community colleges to community-based organizations to workforce investment boards — a coalition of people concerned about getting people the skills they need to go to work and get family-wage jobs. I've been going to their conferences and meetings now for about five or six years. Part of what we do when we go — it's an advocacy summit — we talk about the issues on The Hill, what's the legislation that's going to affect workforce policy, then we go and talk with our congressional delegation and we try to get them to vote for policies that will help workforce development.

## What is your part?

I'm part of the Leadership Priorities Council, which is separate from the board of directors. This is a group that helps set the legislative agenda. Staff watches what is going on with policy and talks to us about where we should put our efforts. We help shape the agenda: What are the components of it? What are we going to ask people to talk about when they talk to their congressional staff?

## What is the agenda?

The agenda has been for the last two years this issue around middle-skill jobs. They are jobs that require more than a high-school education, but less than a four-year degree. They are 52 percent of jobs in New Hampshire, but only 42 percent of the population has the skills to fill those jobs, according to a 2007 data. ... The agenda is to make sure all our legislative policy contains funding for training of workers. Let me give you an example: Sen. [Jeanne] Shaheen is on the energy committee. ... There will be a lot of legislation surrounding energy. Whatever that legislation is, we need to make sure there is funding in that legislation to train a skilled workforce.

## What does money pay for?

The training has to be developed. You don't just say let's build wind turbines tomorrow and then all the skill sets for training fall out of the sky. It has to be developed. You have to do an analysis about where the skills are, what the standards are. The curriculum has to be developed. It's just like developing any type of curriculum for any program. So, we're making sure there's money out there to develop the curriculum, and then be able to train the folks. If you're not able to go to school full time, you can't get access to financial aid. If you're supporting a family, you can't pay for college, because you're supporting a family. You either get a loan or a scholarship or there are monies available to support skill training. Those funds are also important for us in terms of infrastructure, equipment and laboratories; to be able to educate peo-



Darlene Miller  
(Courtesy Photo)

ple. For instance, if New Hampshire moves in the direction of wind turbines and there is an energy bill to support such, we need to ensure ... money for infrastructure so we can buy the equipment necessary to train and educate workers on wind turbines.

## Are there too many skilled workers?

Actually, no. For a strong economy, you still need people at high skill levels. You need engineers, entrepreneurs, business leaders and scientists. What we need to ensure is that there are enough workers at the middle-skill level to support those jobs. If an entrepreneur wants to design a product, in order to bring that product to reality, they need the technicians to design the product, to build the product and to sell the product. Entrepreneurship drives innovation, innovation drives productivity, productivity drives the economy. You need to have people to support all that to make economic development work.

## You were in Washington recently?

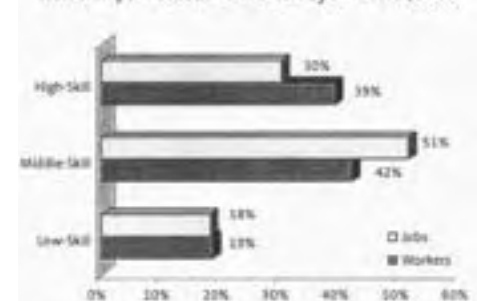
When I was in Washington, I met with the staffers in Sen. [Jeanne] Shaheen's office, Sen. [Judd] Gregg's office and Congresswoman [Carol] Shea-Porter's office. I went to the workforce alliance summit meeting, then spoke with the congressional staff. I met with them to talk about middle-skill jobs. I also talked with them about a bill being presented, both in the Congress and the Senate, called The SECTORS [Strengthening Employment Clusters to Organize Regional Suc-

cess] Act. So the SECTORS Act is about forming industry or sector partnerships, bringing together stakeholders connected to an industry. The idea is to develop plans for growing that industry and developing a pipeline for skilled workers. In my estimation, it fits very nicely with the Metro Center[-NH]'s work. I think it would be very supportive of the Metro Center. I asked the [representatives] and senators to co-sponsor the act, it would bring grant money to the state to develop these partnerships. It would help long-term in supporting workforce development and the growth of the state.

## Does this connect with your job?

This is what community colleges do. We prepare people for middle-skill jobs. Our role is to play a pivotal role in the community, to help the economic growth of the community. As a community college president, it's important that I stay on top of these issues and support initiatives that will help train the workers that the companies in our communities need. It supports the people in the community who are looking for jobs. It helps us make sure we're training for the jobs that people need.

New Hampshire Jobs and Workers by Skill Level, 2007



Sources: New Hampshire Employment Security & US Bureau of the Census