GOVERNOR OTTER CREATES EMPLOYER-DRIVEN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

(BOISE) – Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter announced creation today of a Governor’s Workforce Development Task Force charged with studying ways to improve Idaho’s funding and delivery of training programs to meet growing employer demand for skilled workers.

Membership of the Task Force is still being finalized, but it will include representatives of such industries as health care, aerospace, food processing, natural resources, advanced manufacturing, energy, and construction – all fields with a high demand for more qualified employees. It also will include representatives of education and career-technical training programs and the existing Workforce Development Council.

The Idaho Department of Labor reports that while more Idaho citizens than ever are employed, many citizens remain underemployed due to a lack of needed skills, and thousands of Idaho jobs are chronically unfilled due to a shortage of qualified workers. The agency projects that Idaho faces a critical shortage of tens of thousands of skilled workers by 2020, putting statewide economic growth at risk.

“Idaho businesses are champing at the bit to grow, but they’re being held up by a shortage of workers with the education and training to do the increasingly technical jobs that are the mainstay of the modern workplace,” Governor Otter said. “We can and must do better. That means exploring best practices from the perspectives of those who sign the checks and are on the front lines of meeting industry’s employment needs.”

The Task Force will be led by co-chairs Brian Whitlock, president and CEO of the Idaho Hospital Association; and Dr. David Hill, a physicist, State Board of Education member and retired senior executive at the Idaho National Laboratory. The Idaho House of Representatives and the Idaho Senate will appoint one member each, and the Idaho Department of Labor, Idaho Department of Commerce and the State Division of Career & Technical Education will provide technical and administrative support.

“There are few issues more important or of more immediate concern to health care than ensuring we have people with the training and skills necessary for today’s hospital environment,” Whitlock said. “With our population aging and demand for care exceeding available resources, this Task Force offers the chance to steer Idaho’s efforts more efficiently and effectively toward meeting our on-the-ground employment realities.”
“Idaho has great people, eager to learn, adapt and grow to meet any circumstance. It’s our job – both on this Task Force and on the Board of Education – to ensure that they can acquire the expertise needed to compete in a rapidly changing economy,” Dr. Hill said. “Our goal is to determine how best to prioritize and allocate scarce resources toward providing more skilled workers to fill today’s jobs so we can remain competitive in an increasingly complex and competitive global economy.”

The Task Force will meet as needed in the coming months, hearing from workforce development experts, trade union representatives and others to develop findings and recommendations for Governor Otter and the Workforce Development Council by July 1. That deadline is aimed at having any statutory changes needed to enact the recommendations ready for the 2018 session of the Idaho Legislature.

The effort is part of the Governor’s “K-through-Career” campaign and the statewide goal of 60 percent of Idahoans between the ages of 25 and 34 having a postsecondary degree or technical certification by 2020. That number now is estimated to be less than 50 percent.

Creation of the Task Force comes as Governor Otter seeks legislators’ approval for the transfer of $5 million from the General Fund to the Workforce Development Training Fund in the fiscal year that begins July 1. The Training Fund now is funded exclusively from a 3-percent share of receipts from the tax that businesses pay for unemployment insurance. However, that funding has failed to keep up with workforce training needs even at current tax rates, and the Governor is seeking a reduction in those rates to save employers an estimated $46 million in the coming year and $115 million over the next three years.

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