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## COMMENTARY: HOW WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CAN KEEP TEXAS STRONG

By [Jason Schenker](#)

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There's a lot to be happy about when it comes to the Texas economy. The latest estimates by the Texas comptroller reflect a budget surplus of \$32.7 billion, recent Texas jobs data have been robust, and state growth is strong. Current conditions are very positive, but what would support Texas growth and wealth creation far into the future?

The answer is workforce development.

Although Texas has a strong economy that is the envy of most other states, we need more qualified workers for the jobs that will continue to keep us strong. The most urgent shortages exist in health care, commercial transportation and skilled labor trades.

A resilient Texas economy offers workers the opportunity to become middle-class earners, regardless of their economic origins. A vital ingredient of that success is education, which takes many forms, including working with Texas community colleges to significantly accelerate skill development and credentialing in those critical parts of the workforce where labor shortfalls currently and in the future present threats to prosperity and the labor market.

An ambitious but achievable goal is embodied by the 60x30TX program. It is one of the three primary goals of the 2022-30 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Building a Talent Strong Texas strategic plan, which aims to see 60 percent of all Texas residents complete some form of postsecondary education by the year 2030. This includes college but also community college certifications, professional certifications, credentialing programs, trade schools and more.

Education attainment is essential to Texas' economic competitiveness. Moreover, aspiring to a 60 percent completion rate for all Texans by 2030 is a noble, reasonable and valuable goal for helping all Texans live in a vibrant economy.

As an economist, I am often asked, "What would be the best thing to invest in?" My answer never changes. The best investment you can make is in your education or your children's education. Education is also the best investment we could make for the Texas economy. Advancing education supports a highly skilled workforce and ensures the continued success of our Texas economy.

The government's principal role is sometimes to fund but always to cheer and facilitate educational attainment.

Many sectors would benefit from government support for education and workforce development, but some sectors have critical and urgent unmet needs. The need for workers in roles that offer significant professional opportunities is most glaring in health care, the trades and commercial transportation. To ensure the economic livability and maximum potential for the Texas labor market and economy, we need to foster workforce development in these essential roles.

People continue to move to Texas at a strong clip and will continue to do so in the decades ahead. But to ensure we have an economy that works for all Texans, we need to encourage workforce development in the areas where labor shortfalls threaten economic development.

I made Texas my home a decade and a half ago because the potential in this state for growth and prosperity was so strong. It is even more apparent today that the Texas economy will be resilient for decades to come — but only if we are agile enough now to deliver the tactical workforce development that is needed by the enterprises of today and tomorrow.

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