

Obama, Biden Announce \$600M in Job Grants

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Striving to show action on jobs, President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden are hitting the road to trumpet \$600 million in new competitive grants to spur creation of targeted training and apprenticeship programs that could help people land well-paying jobs.

They were making the announcement Wednesday at the Community College of Allegheny County West Hills Center in the western Pennsylvania borough of Oakdale.

Administration officials say they hear from too many businesses that they cannot find skilled workers for jobs they need to fill. On top of that, officials say many people who are looking for work may be open to learning new skills but need assurance that a job will be waiting for them at the end of a training program.

Obama and others in the administration often say community colleges are among the best sources for job training and say learn-on-the-job apprenticeship programs provide some of the most direct paths to well-paying jobs.

Although the economy is improving, unemployment remains stubbornly high at 6.7 percent and Obama says more must be done to create jobs.

The programs that Obama and his Pennsylvania-born vice president are announcing do not need approval from Congress because they will be paid for with money that lawmakers have already authorized for spending. In response to stiff resistance to his agenda from Republican lawmakers, Obama has made it a goal this year to take smaller steps on his own, without support from Congress, to benefit the economy, workers and others, and Wednesday's program fits that script.

The larger of the two grant programs will put nearly \$500 million toward a job training competition run by the Labor Department that is designed to encourage community colleges, employers and industry to work together to create training programs that are geared toward the jobs employers need to fill. Applications will be available starting Wednesday.

The training is part of an existing competitive grant program for community colleges that prepare dislocated workers and others for jobs.

A priority will be placed on partnerships that include national entities, such as industry associations, that pledge to help design and institute programs that give job seekers a credential that will be recognized and accepted across a particular industry, signaling to an employer what kind of work the holder can do.

The Labor Department is also making an additional \$100 million available for grants

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to reward partnerships that expand apprenticeship programs.

Apprenticeships are used less widely in the U.S. than in some other countries, said administration officials, who also noted that nearly 9 out of 10 apprentices end up in jobs that pay average starting salaries of above \$50,000 a year.

The apprenticeship grant program will begin in the fall and focus, in part, on broad partnerships that create programs in high-growth fields, such as information technology, health care and advanced manufacturing, as well as programs that provide college credit or industry-wide skills certification.

Obama earlier this year put Biden, who is a native of Scranton, Pa., in charge of a "soup-to-nuts" review of federal job-training programs, and set a July 30 deadline for his report.

House Republicans have complained that Biden's effort is a waste of time because the Government Accountability Office, the auditing arm of Congress, has identified redundancies in a comprehensive review it completed in 2011. They have urged Obama to press his allies in the Democratic-controlled Senate to vote on a House-passed measure that proposes to streamline dozens of duplicative job training programs.

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