

Embrace apprenticeships, employers

BY PAUL CHAMPION

The U.S. is experiencing the lowest unemployment rate since October 1969 with a rate of just 3.7 percent. Speaking in generalities, this is something to be celebrated; however, with it comes new problems. The skills gap is widening on a grand scale and the labor market is screaming for a quality, skilled workforce pipeline able to fill their entry- to mid-level vacancies. Furthermore, as our workforce ages and retires and the number of qualified workers stagnates, we need a pipeline to train and develop skilled workers quickly and affordably. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the labor force participation rate will drop significantly from 67.1 percent in 2000 to 61 percent in 2026 as a result of the aging population.

A vehicle for the unemployed and under-employed as well as current incumbent workers to gain the specific skills, certifications and training necessary to become that pipeline is desperately needed. Luckily, that vehicle already exists and has existed for centuries: registered apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships build a pipeline of eager, loyal workers with skills completely customized to the employers' needs. In addition to, in essence, "building an employee" through hand-picking the skill sets for training, companies that embrace this workforce solution experience increased retention and they save money on wages and with an improved bottom line.

These positive outcomes are seen around the world in apprenticeship-friendly countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada.

The labor market is changing rapidly, especially in technology-related fields, where jobs come and go as technology changes. By 2020, the United States will face a shortage of 5 million workers with the necessary technical certificates and credentials, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Jobs are becoming available with few skilled enough to fill them. In recent years, the U.S. has begun to address this issue in the technology sector as well as a myriad of other industries by investing in registered apprenticeships.

Twenty-first-century apprenticeship programs build on the back of traditional apprenticeship programs, such as roofing, plumbing and other industries within the trades, and expand the concept to include professions within information technology, health care and finance among many others. TranZed Apprenticeship Services, affiliated with The Children's Guild, for example, offers apprenticeships in information technology, digital and social media, cyber security, data science, secure coding and medical assistance. Our flexible programs are tailored to both the employer's and apprentice's needs and offer industry-recognized certificates crucial to success.

Apprenticeship is full-time, competitive employment without the requirement of four-year degrees, narrowing the postsec-

ondary achievement gap and reducing income inequality. Available to everyone, apprenticeships offer an alternative to academic-only, four-year colleges and offer a "learn by doing" environment suited for individuals of varied learning styles and educational backgrounds. An apprentice learns, contributes and earns money at the same time, while studying in the classroom, training in the workplace and gaining useful, marketable skills, experience and certifications.

Job openings in the U.S. totaled 7 million this month, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many of them don't require workers with four-year degrees, and four-year degrees don't guarantee the skills necessary to get the job done. It's time, then, for a better alternative. As the skills gap grows, student loan debt increases and new job requirements emerge, now is the time for another source of workers to meet demand.

While continued government support for apprenticeships is key, it is of the utmost importance for employers to lead the way by being open to apprenticeship, and it is time to recognize registered apprenticeship as part of a recruitment strategy.

Capable apprentices are lining up in unprecedented numbers to and fill the millions of existing job openings. Now we look to employers to open their doors.

Paul Champion is president of TranZed Apprenticeship Services based in Baltimore. His email address is championp@tranzed.org.

Baltimore leaders band together as anti-Semitism surges

BY ZEKE COHEN

The murder of 11 Jews in a synagogue on the Sabbath is the devastating consequence of our decaying national discourse. Hate speech is wielded by profiteers and politicians whose goal is to divide, devalue and dehumanize. They conjure mythical hordes of black, brown and Middle Eastern "barbarians" invading our southern border. The dog-whistle has become a bullhorn. And people like the Pittsburgh shooter are listening.

White nationalists have answered the call in cities and towns across America. Neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville with tiki-torches, chanting "Jews will not replace us," and one used his car as a deadly weapon. Here in Baltimore, a man shouted "heil Hitler, heil Trump" during the intermission of a performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" at the Hippodrome Theatre on Wednesday. Anti-Muslim bigotry has led to an unprecedented spike in hate crimes and bias incidents. Some women have taken off their hijabs to avoid being targeted, and communities have been plagued with an epidemic of faith-based bullying where, according to recent reports, over half of Muslim students are harassed in U.S. public schools. Members of the Ku Klux Klan have been emboldened to distribute racist recruitment pamphlets in communities all over the United States including here in Maryland. ICE raids have ripped children from parents, including a father who was taken in Southeast Baltimore outside of his son's elementary school. We've seen a spike in suicide attempts among immigrant teenagers who worry that their families could be next. The toxic political

As Jewish, Muslim, black and first-generation immigrant advocates and elected officials, we come from different backgrounds, but we share a commitment to Baltimore and a bond with each other. We see strength in our diversity. We place our faith in democracy. Our message is simple: We need each other — now more than ever.



NUCCIO DINUZZO/TNS

A doctor touches the hand of a gunshot victim who was being treated in the trauma center at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital in Chicago.

Reducing repeat victims

Congressman: 'Even small actions are better than thoughts and prayers'

BY DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER

You may have heard about the social media firestorm that erupted earlier this week between the National Rifle Association and doctors around the country. Responding to a position paper from the American College of Physicians that suggested a public health approach to gun violence, the NRA took to Twitter to urge "self-important" physicians to "stay in their lane."

I'd urge the NRA to talk to some of the emergency room surgeons here in Maryland — particularly those at the University of Maryland's Shock Trauma in downtown Baltimore — and ask them if they deserve a voice in the gun control debate as they pull bullet after bullet from patients. At one of the nation's busiest and best-ranked centers, 8,000 patients come through Shock Trauma's doors a year, a staggering 20 percent of whom are victims of violence. Most of these are stabbings and shootings, and that figure is rising at an alarming rate.

Dr. Tom Scalea, physician-in-chief at Shock Trauma, says that many of his patients with gunshot wounds are "repeat customers." They are caught up in the drug wars, the culture of retaliation and "disrespect," to borrow his words. In fact, the rate of violent re-injury at most trauma centers is as high as 45 percent. One of the leading risk factors for violent

injury is a prior violent injury.

Here in Maryland, Shock Trauma doctors have created a Violence Intervention Program to reduce this "revolving door phenomenon." Recovering patients are a captive audience, confined to a bed and off the streets, if only for a few days. The program provides them with a bedside assessment, counseling and social support. Sometimes they just need a little help — groceries, bus money or some clothes. Often, they need help finding an affordable apartment or getting off drugs or landing a job.

The program's founder, Dr. Carnell Cooper, says he has demonstrated a decline in violent re-injury, recidivism, jail time, cost of incarceration and unemployment.

Many Marylanders know that my life was saved at Shock Trauma after a horrific car crash in the 1970s. I remain an active member of their board and one of the hospital's loudest cheerleaders. And I want the rest of the country to benefit from the amazing work that is going on under its roof.

That is why I am drafting legislation to take the Violence Intervention Program nationwide. My bill will start small — I'd like to provide five more hospitals with a federal grant to do this over the next three years. We will monitor the process and have them report back to Congress.

It is my hope that, eventually, every

hospital in America will have a program like this.

This bill doesn't replace the other common sense measures Congress must pass to keep guns away from bad guys, like universal background checks. There are also things we must do to reduce the carnage: ban bump stocks, high-capacity magazines and assault weapons. We should also provide resources to state and local law enforcement to put a resource officer in every school in America.

But until all lawmakers stand up to the gun lobby once and for all, these are pipe dreams. Remember, House Republicans beholden to the NRA have actually pursued looser gun laws this year — bills that deregulated the sale of silencers and would allow more people to carry guns without training. They have even gone so far as to stop the collection of data on gun violence in America to prevent meaningful research on the motivations behind gun crimes.

My bill is easy for members of both parties to support. It won't cost much, and the impact will be immediate. Even small actions are better than thoughts and prayers.

Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger is a Democrat representing the 2nd District of Maryland. He is a member of the University of Maryland Shock Trauma's Board of Visitors. Twitter: @Call_Me_Dutch.

climate is literally killing us.

Yet, within our own local communities, we have the power to embrace a different vision. We can work to overcome centuries of segregation and mistrust by standing up for each other. As Jewish, Muslim, black and first-generation immigrant advocates and elected officials, we come from different backgrounds, but we share a commitment to Baltimore and a bond with each other. We see strength in our diversity. We place our faith in democracy. Our message is simple: We need each other — now more than ever.

We stand together in this moment because we have worked together and built relationships over time. We mobilized for police accountability and criminal justice reform through the federal consent decree between the U.S. Department of Justice and Baltimore police. We fought to preserve after school programs and transportation for our students. When the father of a 9-year-old child was detained in Baltimore in an ICE raid outside his son's elementary school, we worked together to pass a City Council resolution to reaffirm the city's status as a Welcoming City. We started an immigrant legal defense fund.

After the massacre of Jewish worshippers in Pittsburgh, the Council on American-Islamic Relations provided security and solidarity through their presence while congregants of Hinenu, Baltimore's newest Jewish synagogue, gathered for Shabbat services. We see a direct connection between the mass incarceration of black Baltimoreans, the bullying of Muslim citizens, and the unjust imprisonment and deportation of immigrant members of our community. We are changing the conversation from one of hate to one of unity, right here in our own backyard.

Our history is filled with moments of powerful connection and deep division. At our best, we have fought together, prayed together, marched together and defended each other's right to exist. At our worst, we have been actively complicit in each other's oppression. We cannot pretend away our differences, ignore the pain we have caused or dismiss our complicated politics. But we can use this moment of national discord, to heal at home. We have decided that in Baltimore, we will not fear each other. We will stand shoulder to shoulder and fight for each other. We encourage you to join us.

Shalom. Salaam. Paz. Peace.
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