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Guest Column:

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Invest in Our Young People to Build the Workforce of Tomorrow

Another school year has begun. Between shopping for supplies and meeting new teachers, let's take a moment to talk about Ohio's education system and its impact on the workforce of tomorrow. Businesses across the state are struggling now more than ever to find and keep quality employees. The COVID-19 pandemic didn't help, but it's not the root of the problem, either.

Our students are often not adequately prepared to succeed in the workforce, and if they are, they still may leave Ohio after graduation. For anyone who wants our state to become a better place to live and work, ensuring people want to stay here is absolutely vital.

We offer so many educational and professional opportunities in the Buckeye state— Columbus has one of the highest concentrations of higher education in the nation; Cleveland has consistently highly rated hospital systems; Cincinnati has the most Fortune 500 companies of any city in Ohio; Toledo is one of the top-ranked cities for manufacturing in the U.S. This is not to mention our amusement parks, museums, sports teams and state parks. Ohio is truly a wonderful to live and raise a family.

So why do we struggle to retain our younger talent? We simply don't offer them the benefits we should.

In December of 2021, Rep. Jon Cross announced his proposed legislation: the GROW (Graduating and Retaining Ohio's Workforce) Ohio Act. The Ohio Chamber of Commerce is proud to support this legislation that aims to help Ohio rebuild its population, and ultimately its workforce, by creating state incentives to keep and attract recent graduates.

The bill has four key aspects. First, it will offer graduating college students a 100% refundable state income tax payment for up to three years of employment, if they choose to take a full-time job offer in Ohio rather than out of state.

Second, with the Choose Ohio First Program, \$25,000 merit-based scholarships will be offered to 100 out-of-state students who are pursuing STEM-related degrees if they choose to enroll in Ohio colleges or universities.

Third, to encourage employers to offer paid internships, apprenticeships and co-ops for students, the state will offer a 30% credit to subsidize these students' wages.

Finally, the legislation will offer grants to students with associate degrees who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree. This is the kind of legislation that everyone should support. Our young people are our future, and we need to invest in them.

For students who aren't going to college, Ohio's TechCred program can be a great option. TechCred is an upskilling program funded by the State of Ohio for incumbent or potential workers to get the skills they need for future jobs. Education needs to innovate and incorporate more career pathways and work-based learning into students' educational experiences and now business can partner to support that effort.

Work-based learning is truly the linchpin in developing the workforce of the future. Whether it is internships, apprenticeships, or mentorships, these opportunities provide an important first step into what may become a career for our young folks.

So, whether you know a young person who is starting kindergarten or college, consider their skills and talents and imagine what an asset they could someday be to our state. Plus, I'm sure you'd love to have them stick around the State of Ohio, right? I know I would.

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