



Jobs for Young Hoosiers: Building people, public works and our schools
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Summary of "Jobs for Hoosier Youth"

Let's balance the needs of our young people in need of jobs with the needs of our neighborhoods and our school kids. Let's pass legislation to allow our unemployed young people to plan, organize and implement local projects such as sidewalk construction, bike paths, renovation of parks, and the design and installation of sewer systems. Let them also work as assistants in our schools so that they can enhance educational reform. This will provide them with experience, build their self-esteem, and strengthen our state for years ahead.

Introduction

Since January 2 of this year I have visited with thousands of voters at their front doors. Hoosiers are focused on the job market. But, none of my voters are as focused as parents of recent high school and college graduates. A number of these parents have asked me to wait at the door while they bring forward their young graduate for an introduction. Many of these young people are highly qualified but cannot even get a job interview in today's economy. In July 2010, 4.4 million youth were unemployed, essentially the same as in July 2009. The national youth unemployment rate edged up to 19.1 percent in July 2010, the highest July rate on record which began in 1948. I believe that it is wrong to let this talent go to waste. It is doubly wrong when our young people can help to meet public needs that we can finance at a reasonable cost from available resources.

I have a two-pronged proposal designed to deal with the problem of unemployment among our youth.

Public Works for Youth

Over the last two summers our Indiana Department of Natural Resources has employed thousands of young Hoosiers in an effort to spruce up our state parks. The Young Hoosiers Conservation Corps program has been a great success and has cost very little, in part because of federal support. This program could be seen as the first step in a far larger program to help our youth build their future and that of our state. My proposal is that we use the resources of our young people, our universities, our local governments and our private businesses to build something we will all remember and be proud of. We can ask our young MBAs to set up small for-profit companies that will build sidewalks, improve our

drainage, and help convert rail beds into trails. We can ask our young civil engineers to directly manage the tasks. We can ask high school grads and dropouts to run the backhoes and help with the books. We can ask our banks to provide loans in order to facilitate cash flow. We can ask our economic development officials to set aside some of their traditional plans for something much simpler. We can move a portion of our Major Moves money from building highways and direct it down to the local and neighborhood levels. When we are done, we will have accomplished three things: we will have helped our young people, we will be able to use what they have created every day, and we can take pride in making government work for us.

Putting Young Graduates into our Schools

I would not limit the effort to employ our youth to public works or infrastructure. I am distressed by our failure to do more to better educate our younger children, those from 3 to 18 years old. We are reducing the number of teachers and the number of electives. We are reducing our already limited efforts to teach our children second languages. Yet at the same time our colleges and universities continue to produce highly qualified students. There are fewer jobs available for these people in our educational system as we struggle to maintain our current staffing levels. Could we not involve some of these young people as interns, visiting experts, summer school staff or strength and conditioning coaches? All this would be done in order to supplement our regular teaching staff. The federal government has just awarded over \$200 million to Indiana to help maintain education during the economic crisis. I suggest we take a modest part of that money to put young college graduates, whether formally trained in education or not, to work in our schools. The models for this already exist but on a limited scale. Can't we raise reading levels? Couldn't new graduates help to shrink the waistlines of our kids? Couldn't they help us all in the transition to a better educational system? Could they help us make full-time kindergarten a reality in Indiana?