



Starting over: Funds for worker retraining drying up

By John Nolan, Staff Writer

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DAYTON — Paula Fannon Ruzick followed her parents into automotive factory work, expecting that her job with General Motors Corp. and later Delphi Corp., would last a lifetime.

But the former assembly-line worker and forklift driver overhauled her career plans after her father, Silas Fannon, a former GM worker and president of United Auto Workers Local 696 in Dayton, cautioned her that the auto industry was changing and her employment future could be at risk. In 2005, Delphi filed for bankruptcy reorganization, eventually resulting in closure of four of its five Dayton-area auto parts plants and forcing about 5,000 employees to retire or find new careers.

Ruzick, 54, of Kettering, said a Delphi tuition assistance program paid for the education she needed in pharmacology, medical terminology and related courses to start a new career in medical billing for a physicians' office.

"It was the most stressful thing I had to do in my life, going back to school," she said. "But it was something I knew I had to do."

Ruzick began taking the night classes at RETS College (now Fortis College) in Centerville before she retired in 2006 from Delphi's Needmore Road brake plant with 30 years' service. Her resulting job in medical billing helped her and her husband pay for a house and educate two children, she said.

The Cato Institute, a Washington-based organization that promotes limited government and free markets, says the private sector — as it did in Ruzick's case — should be involved in job retraining, not the federal government. Government programs are inefficient and a drain on taxpayers, while the for-profit private sector has direct motivation to train people to fill jobs in demand, said Tad DeHaven, a Cato budget analyst.

"Nothing the government does is a free lunch," DeHaven said. "Everything it does comes at a cost. One dollar it spends on a job training program is one dollar somebody in the private sector loses."

With increasing pressure on Washington to slash federal spending, President Obama's budget for fiscal 2012 proposes to cut funding for the Department of Labor — home of most of the government's worker training, placement and benefits programs — to \$12.8 billion, down 5 percent from the 2010 appropriation.

Obama proposes cutting funding by 25 percent for the youth-serving Job Corps construction budget; cutting by 45 percent the money for a program designed to train older people for returning to the work force, and allocating \$380 million for a new Workforce Innovation Fund to test new ideas and replicate proven strategies for worker employment and education. Congress is moving to rewrite Obama's budget, with Republicans pushing for deeper cuts.

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis told a Washington conference of community college officials this month that tough funding choices were at hand, said Deb Norris, Sinclair Community College's vice president for workforce development, who attended the conference. Cuts in workforce training and education programs come at a time of increasing need for those services, Norris said.

Federally funded programs have helped many former Delphi, GM and other displaced workers obtain training for new careers, said Tony Curington, a former vice president of UAW Local 696 who concluded his union tenure by helping fellow members find training funds and new job opportunities. Curington, 60, of Dayton, is still performing that service for unemployed manufacturing workers as a state Department of Job and Family Services employee assigned to the Job Center in Dayton.


"It's an opportunity to kind of re-invent yourself into another career path," he said. "Training is what you need to get there."

The Trade Adjustment Assistance program, which provides education and training support for workers who lost their jobs because of foreign competition, has been particularly helpful for Ohio workers who lost automotive and other manufacturing jobs, Curington said.

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