

BUSINESS

9 TO 5

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Franken pushes for focus on skills training

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

A Minnesota senator is revamping his efforts to address the “skills gap” in high-skill manufacturing jobs. Sen. Al Franken last week launched an initiative with 21 other senators to focus on helping fill and create high-skill manufacturing jobs. The “skills gap” refers to jobs that go unfilled because businesses can’t find workers with the right skills. According to a release, this has left more than 3 million jobs in the U.S. unfilled, including hundreds of thousands in manufacturing. The Manufacturing Jobs for America initiative’s goals are to build bipartisan support for legislation designed to modernize the manufacturing sector, help manufacturers grow and create jobs, and help workers get the skills to succeed in the next generation of manufacturing jobs. The bills housed under this initiative look to strengthen the workforce, open foreign markets, create conditions for growth, and expand access to capital for manufac-

turers. Rainy River Community College is making an effort to get involved with this initiative, Elena Favela, interim dean of students, said.

“I think Senator Franken is right on target with addressing Minnesota’s skills gap in the manufacturing sector,” she said. “Rainy will do everything we can to help fill the 3 million vacant jobs that the senator talks about with trained, qualified, and highly skilled workers.” Currently, RRCC is reworking its industrial technology program to better suit the needs of Minnesota’s manufacturers. “We are in the process of connecting with business and industry in manufacturing in Minnesota to figure out how we can redesign our industrial technology program to train students to meet industry employee qualifications,” Favela said. “This will allow us to create



Al Franken

a curriculum that will train students to specifically meet employer needs.” She said while students have been entering fields highly skilled in their craft, RRCC has heard from employers the students sometimes lack communication skills, organization skills, time-management skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work well on teams. “These are competencies that every company seeks in a potential hire,” Favela said. “We work very diligently to make sure the students here are equipped with these competencies.” RRCC currently receives funding from the Applied Learning Institute, an organization funded by the state that works to create workers who are equipped with helpful technical and problem-solving skills, Favela said.

They also receive funding from the Perkins program, a federal grant program that funds career and technical education. And she added, dislocated workers can get funding through the dislocated worker program and get Trade Adjustment Assistance. RRCC has been working with Advanced Minnesota, the corporate and customized training entity for the Northeast Higher Education District, which RRCC is a part of, Favela said. This partnership is helping to create new job training opportunities for employees recently laid off by the Boise Inc. paper mill. “Advanced Minnesota is bringing short term training opportunities for dislocated Boise employees beginning in December with welding,” she said. The Boise layoffs have cre-

ated an interest in all kinds of skills training, Favela said, in both technical and liberal arts. Students are enrolling in nursing, certified nurse’s assistant and home health aide, and securities studies programs. Students can also use RRCC’s two-year industrial technology program as a springboard to a longer, four-year program. “A few current students in this program will transfer to a four-year university to continue their studies in manufacturing and to increase their knowledge and earning potential,” she said.

Franken has been traveling throughout Minnesota to meet with businesses and education leaders to hear how the Community College to Career Fund Act would help them. “I’m very pleased that my bill has received high praise from officials at the Northeast Higher Education District,” Franken said. “I know that NHED President Sue Collins, who resides in Borderland, is very interested in the legislation and the opportunities it could provide to the area’s colleges, including Rainy River.”

COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO CAREER FUND ACT

Franken introduced the Community College to Career Fund Act in July, and the bill is currently assigned to a congressional committee, which will consider it before sending it on to the House or Senate as a whole. The act will create a grant program that will fund partnerships between businesses and two-year colleges to address the skills gap. The partnerships will focus on valuable job training-related efforts like registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training opportu-

Average retail gas prices continue to decline

Local prices down to \$3.17 per gallon  
JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Average retail gasoline prices in Minnesota have fallen 10.8 cents in the past week, averaging \$3.04 per gallon Sunday, according


to GasBuddy’s daily survey of 2,856 gas outlets in Minnesota. This compares with the national average that has decreased 5.4 cents per gallon in the last week to \$3.20 per gallon, according to gasoline price website MinnesotaGasPrices.com. Gas prices in International Falls Sunday ranged from \$3.17 to \$3.19, according to the website.

Including the change in gas prices in Minnesota during the past week, prices Sunday were 21.7 cents per gallon lower compared to the same day one year ago and are 25.8 cents per gallon lower than a month ago. The national average has decreased 17.4 cents during the last month and stands 26.7 cents per gallon lower than this day one year ago.

“Gas prices across many communities are now the lowest since they’ve been since the Libyan crisis in February of 2011. Nearly 15 percent of all stations in the U.S. are now selling gasoline under the psychologically important \$3 per gallon level,” said GasBuddy.com Senior Petroleum Analyst Patrick DeHaan. “Last year on this date saw just 1 per-

cent of stations selling under that level, so motorists aren’t doing too shabby. States that saw the largest declines last week were Montana, Ohio, and Indiana, all where prices declined at least 15 cents per gallon. Several stations in Tulsa, Okla., which features the cheapest gas in the U.S. are selling at a mere \$2.45 per gallon, a number so low that had you said that

just six weeks ago, motorists would have been shaking their heads in disbelief. Prices nationally could drop to as little as \$3.05 a gallon by Christmas,” DeHaan said. GasBuddy operates MinnesotaGasPrices.com and over 250 similar websites that track gasoline prices at more than 140,000 gasoline stations in the United States and Canada.



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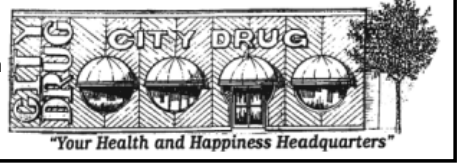
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