

# A Labor Day without enough labor to go around

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Love and work, said Sigmund Freud, are the fundamental human needs. It's tough to measure the amount of love in Washington, but the state's unemployment rate has become a rolling disaster.

This Labor Day isn't much of an occasion for more than 300,000 jobless Washingtonians; when every day's a holiday, no day's a holiday. There's no turnaround in sight: The state jobless rate, which had been edging downward for months, recently ticked upward again, to 9.3 percent.

Nor does that statistic reflect the countless people who can't find full-time jobs or have flat given up looking for work. And it conceals groups suffering unusual distress, such as out-of-work African Americans and military veterans who enlisted after the 9/11 attacks.

Those who have work should count themselves very fortunate. It doesn't take a Freud to see how important a job is to self-respect and family welfare.

People who've fallen out of the job market suffer high rates of depression and social withdrawal. Their marriages are often stressed. For obvious reasons, they and their children suffer higher rates of poverty.

When the state, national and global economies are in the tank, a lot of that suffering simply has to be borne. But not all.

Employers, for example, may be able to stretch their payrolls to cover a few additional workers. They can seek out qualified veterans. Washington and some other states encourage employers to avoid layoffs by supplementing reduced-hour work schedules with unemployment benefits.

In this state, one strange statistic points to another remedy.

While legions of Washingtonians are out of work, 60,000 jobs are going begging for lack of qualified applicants - an increase of 28,000 over the last two years.

The missing link in this disconnect is often education. A jobless construction worker or waiter may be hungry for work but lacking the qualifications needed to move into aerospace, nursing, software or other expanding fields.

The answer is retraining, the specialty of community and technical colleges. They do a superb job of helping workers switch careers at low cost.

But the recession and the cash-strapped Legislature have wrought havoc with them, too. Since mid-2009, state funding for Washington's 34 two-year schools has fallen from \$750 million to \$592 million a year. The colleges nevertheless took on an additional 14,000 students - but more budget cuts would inevitably squeeze off access to critical job-training programs.

Unfilled jobs fetter the economy; unemployment torments families, while education helps fix both problems. That's a connection to keep in mind on a Labor Day that feels a little sour to many Washingtonians.

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