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American Technical Training Fund: Creating a Strong Training Pipeline to Middle-Class Jobs

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Juan Rodriguez is a 33-year-old son of migrant farm workers and the father of three school-aged children. He recently earned an associate's degree in welding technology from Lake Washington Institute of Technology (LWIT).

Before enrolling in the training program, Juan had been laid off from his job and was relying on unemployment benefits and federal food assistance to support his family. After graduating, Rodriguez was hired as a quality manager at Skyline Steel's manufacturing mill. He has since moved his family to Texas, where he works as a welding engineer for Kiewit Offshore Services and earns more than \$100,000 a year.

He credits the education and training he received at LWIT with helping him reach his dream of securing a good job that allows him to support his family without public assistance.

Rodriguez is just one of many Americans who has benefited from high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs, which is why the American Technical Training Fund is so important.

President Obama recently [proposed](#) a bold plan to make two years of community college free for all Americans who are willing to work hard toward graduation. In addition to America's College Promise, the President's [FY 2016 budget request](#) includes a proposal to create a new \$200 million American Technical Training Fund that would expand innovative, high-quality technical training programs that are aligned with the workforce needs of employers in high-demand industries.

This new fund would enable the creation of 100 technical training centers across the country, modeled on the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCAT), which have achieved impressive program completion and job placement rates with many non-traditional postsecondary students.

The President's proposal comes at a time when earning a college certificate or degree has never been more important. In fact, some level of postsecondary education or training has become a prerequisite for joining the middle class. Labor market projections show this trend is only going to increase. By 2020, economists [predict](#) that nearly two thirds of all jobs will require some level of education and training beyond high school. However, [less than 60 percent](#) of Americans 25 years and older currently have this level of preparation. We also know that the U.S. needs to dramatically improve the skills of its adult population. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) most recent [Survey of Adult Skills](#), about 36 million working age adults in the U.S. scored at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels. We are risking America's ability to be economically competitive if we ignore the call to increase the education and skills of our adult workforce.

If authorized by Congress, the American Technical Training Fund will help more community colleges and other postsecondary institutions develop and scale high-quality training programs aligned with the needs of employers in high-demand industries, ensuring more hard-working students will have access to the kinds of life-changing opportunities that Juan Rodriguez and countless others like him have benefited from.

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