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# The Workforce Advocate

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## From the Commissioner

As the new millennium is only a few short months away, there is an increased interest in where we have been and where we are going. I would like to reflect on some notable events of the last 100 years to illustrate how we have evolved as a national workforce.

One of the most striking features of the workplace today is the number of women who actively participate. From airline pilots and astronauts to professional basketball players, doctors and supreme court justices, we have seen job and career opportunities expand as never before. World War II gave women the chance to show that they could perform and compete just as effectively as men, thereby changing the workplace forever.

The advance of technology and the micro-chip have made workers more productive. One person with a computer can produce more work than teams of workers could do in the past. This technology and productivity have been the catalyst for the explosion of goods and services that we benefit from at the close of the 20th Century. What was unthinkable at the turn of the last century or even 50 years ago is now commonplace. Examples include space stations, airplanes that can circle the globe, televisions and cellular phones.

Similarly, medical advances have

allowed us to live longer, healthier and more productive lives. Not long ago, polio was the scourge of our youth and a heart transplant was unthinkable. Organ transplants, joint replacements and laser-assisted surgeries are now routine medical procedures. These advancements have improved our longevity and quality of life, allowing us to enjoy the fruits of our labor.

What can we look for in the next one hundred years? Considering what the last century has given us, it is hard to imagine. One thing we know for certain is the importance of education and job training, as they are the foundation for all job development. We know that productivity is the engine of competition. We also know that the system with which we are blessed to live and work is the finest in the world.

American workers are arguably the most productive workers in the world today. It is our responsibility to make available the training and incentives to keep them there.

We close the 20th century with the labor market performing at record levels. Unemployment is at a 30-year low, the number of workers employed is at an all time high, and real wages continue to grow. As we enter the new millennium, it is my belief that the American dream has never looked better.

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## National Reserve Account Grants for Dislocated Workers

Mass layoffs or terminations in the aerospace, high-tech, oil and gas and other industries have affected approximately 15,000 workers in Texas. These unexpected layoffs have depleted the training and assistance funds in many areas of the state. To assist these newly displaced Texans re-enter the workforce in a timely manner, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) secured a \$12 million National Reserve Account (NRA) grant in June from the U. S. Department of Labor to be distributed through our workforce network. The Dallas, Tarrant County, North Central, South East Texas and Permian Basin Workforce Development Boards, as well as other areas of the state, will use these funds to provide continuing outreach to displaced workers in their areas.

In July, TWC secured an additional NRA grant totaling \$20.9 million to help nearly 1,800 workers who have lost their jobs in the garment and agricultural-related industries along the Texas-Mexico Border. Texas received \$10 million for immediate use. These funds have been allocated to the Middle Rio Grande, South Texas and Cameron County Boards, as well as workforce centers in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties. Training, which can last up to two years, will help workers transition into skilled-labor or professional careers. The grant took effect on July 2 and will be available for members of the target group who have been impacted by layoffs from January 1994 to the present.

These NRA funds will be used in conjunction with other dislocated worker program funds to ensure that resources are effectively leveraged to provide a comprehensive array of re-employment assistance for workers affected by mass layoffs and plant closures. Laid-off workers will be provided access to services that include continuing outreach, intake, orientation, assessment, career counseling, career plan development, job search assistance, job development service, basic education, occupational skills training, supportive services and relocation assistance. Affected workers should contact their local workforce centers to take advantage of these services.

### **T.P. O'MAHONEY**

COMMISSIONER REPRESENTING LABOR  
TEXAS WORKFORCE COMMISSION  
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1997-PRESENT

Terrence (Terry) P. O'Mahoney  
is the Commissioner  
Representing Labor for the  
Texas Workforce Commission.  
Governor George W. Bush  
appointed him to the  
three-member commission  
in July 1997.

His term expires February 1, 2005.

## Moving Forward

# Tele-Center Transition Complete

On July 1, 1999, all Texans became able to access the Texas Workforce Center's tele-center network to conduct unemployment insurance business by phone. The tele-center network is an innovative service that has modernized the way TWC conducts business. It consolidated more than 100 service locations into seven call centers. The process of consolidation started May 1, 1998, when the first tele-center opened in the Austin area. Other tele-centers were gradually added to the network, with each center offering a local number for area residents as well as one toll-free number for Texans in rural areas.

Service to clients has exceeded expectations with an average time spent on hold waiting to file a claim of 63 seconds. Additionally, the system matches a caller's needs to the best-qualified customer service representative available and offers consistency and accuracy throughout the claims process.

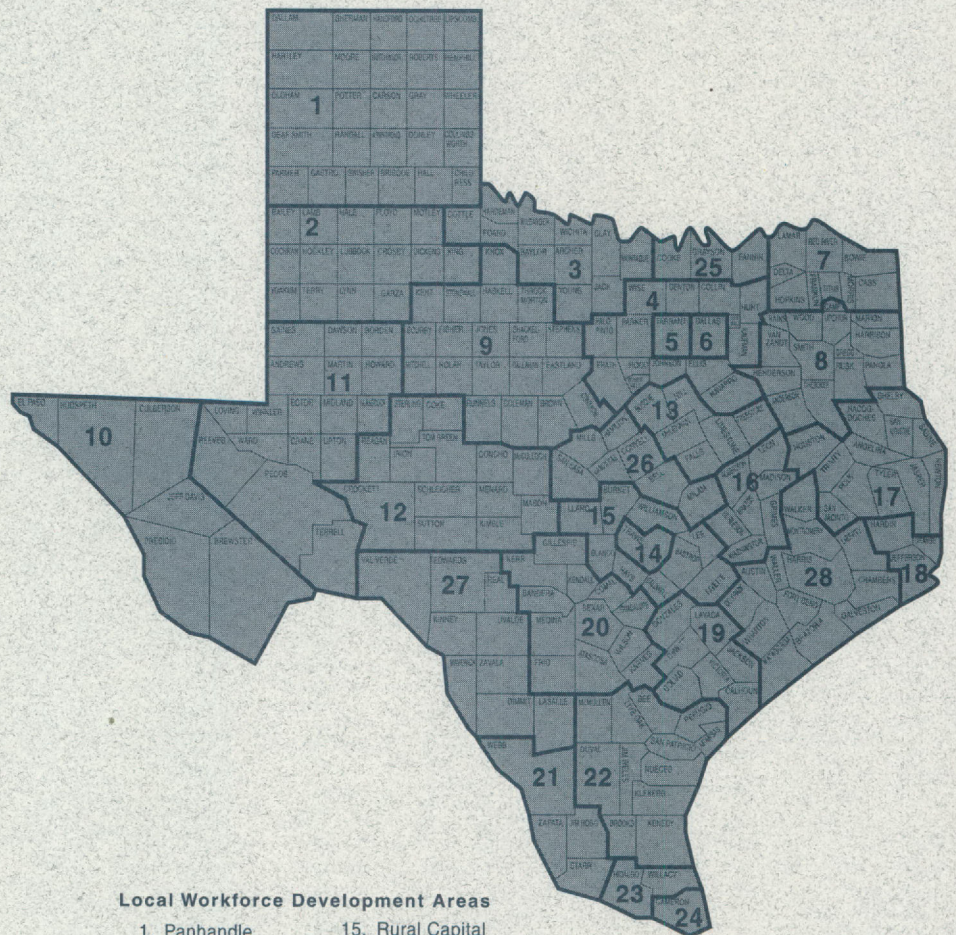
Tele-centers are located in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Ft. Worth, Houston, McAllen and San Antonio.

### Local Numbers

Austin:	512-340-4300
Dallas:	214-252-1200
El Paso:	915-832-6400
Ft. Worth:	817-420-1600
Houston:	713-982-7400
McAllen:	956-984-4700
San Antonio:	210-258-6600

Toll-free Number  
(Outside local areas)  
1-800-939-6631

Callers must select the language and type of service they need by pressing the numbers given in the voice menu. Staff are available to provide assistance Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm local time. Mondays are traditionally the busiest day of the week for filing claims. Faster service is received when calling Wednesday through Friday. As long as the application is submitted by Friday, the claim will not be delayed.



### Local Workforce Development Areas

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Panhandle                            | 15. Rural Capital   |
| 2. South Plains                         | 16. Brazos Valley   |
| 3. North Texas                          | 17. Deep East Texas   |
| 4. North Central                        | 18. South East Texas  |
| 5. Tarrant Co.                          | 19. Golden Crescent   |
| 6. Dallas/Dallas Co.                    | 20. Alamo   |
| 7. North East Texas                     | 21. South Texas   |
| 8. East Texas                           | 22. Coastal Bend<br>(Corpus Christi/<br>Rural Coastal Bend) |
| 9. West Central Texas                   | 23. Hidalgo/Willacy   |
| 10. Upper Rio Grande                    | 24. Cameron Co.   |
| 11. Permian Basin                       | 25. Texoma  |
| 12. Concho Valley                       | 26. Central Texas   |
| 13. Heart of Texas                      | 27. Middle Rio Grande                                       |
| 14. Capital Area<br>(Austin/Travis Co.) | 28. Gulf Coast  |

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The 76th Legislature, which adjourned on June 1, passed 1,621 bills - 134 more bills than last session. Legislators approved tax cuts totaling more than \$276 million for consumers. Many of the bills passed directly affect Texas' workforce development and welfare reform efforts.

\* HB 1 by Junell and Ratliff, which is the General Appropriations Act, provides for the following:

\* Increases funding for apprenticeship by \$750,000 over the biennium.

\* Doubles the appropriation for the Self-Sufficiency Fund, which provides for training for TANF recipients, from \$12 million to \$24 million over the biennium.

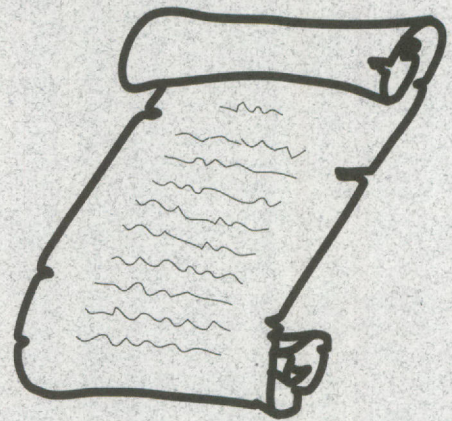
\* Increases child care funding by \$88 million.

\* Requires TWC to use \$1 million in each year of the biennium to contract with governmental entities, nonprofit agencies or community-based organizations to provide a network of child care consumer education services through resource and referral networks.

\* Requires \$4 million of the TANF funds appropriated to TWC during each year of the biennium to be used for long-term employment strategies for TANF recipients, such as job retention and reemployment services, as well as local innovation grants.

\* Replaces the Texas Integrated Enrollment System (TIES) Project with the Texas Integrated Enrollment Redesign System (TIERS) Project, which now will prioritize replacing outdated automated systems and improving the business processes associated with eligibility determination.

\* HB 1689 by Greenberg and Ellis creates a student loan repayment program, adminis-



\* HB 3431 by Delisi and Fraser amends the Texas Council on Workforce and Economic Competitiveness' enabling legislation to clarify that it will serve as the State Workforce Investment Board under the federal Workforce Investment Act. It also repeals the Workforce Development Legislative Oversight Committee established in HB 1863.

\* HB 3480 by Greenberg and Sibley adds community colleges to the type of educational agencies required to be represented on a local workforce development board.

\* HB 3656 by Oliveira and Lucio allows community-based organizations involved in education and training to participate in Skills Development Fund projects in partnership with a community or technical college.

\* HB 3657 by Oliveira and Sibley extends the life of the Smart Jobs Program through August 31, 2001, and specifies that the Skills Development Fund is to receive 66 percent of the money transferred to the Smart Jobs Fund in 1999 and 30 percent in 2000 and beyond.

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tered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, for early childhood childcare workers who agree to work in designated facilities for at least two years.

\* HB 1916 by Oliveira and Lucio allows economic development corporations to use sales tax revenue for up to 50 percent of job training costs for a corporation that creates new jobs paying the average weekly wage for the county, or 90 percent of the average wage in high unemployment areas.

\* SB 231 by Ellis and Dukes requires TWC to develop a marketing campaign to encourage individuals, particularly economically disadvantaged and nontraditional populations, to enter the technology workforce.

\* SB 666 by Zaffirini and Lewis phases out the work requirement exemption for TANF recipients whose youngest child at the time of certification is under the age of four, bringing state law in conformity with federal law. Under this legislation, by January 1, 2001, only recipients with a child under the age of one at the time of certification for benefits will be exempt from work requirements.

\* SB 748 by Shapleigh and Najera requires TWC to provide written notice in English and Spanish of eligibility for home ownership counseling under federal law to each worker residing in Texas who is eligible for trade adjustment assistance.

\* SB 1507 by Truan and Capelo requires TWC, beginning January 1, 2000, to submit to the Legislature an annual report on the effectiveness of federal programs designed to provide trade adjustment assistance.

\* SB 1819 by Luna and Puente requires the board of regents of the Texas State Technical College System to forecast the types of technical education programs needed to ensure the state's economic and technical competitiveness and to share this information with other colleges and universities.

Listed below are miscellaneous bills that impact workers:

\* HB 1 provides state workers with a \$100 per month raise

beginning September 1. This is the first time state employees have received raises in back-to-back legislative sessions in 10 years.

\* HB 145 by Thompson and Harris authorizes the court to enforce an order for spousal maintenance by garnishing the wages of the person who must pay the maintenance. This bill is contingent on passage of a constitutional amendment.

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**The 76th Legislative Session was positive for TWC and its mission to promote and support a workforce system that offers individuals, employers, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.**

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\* HB 160 by Wise and Zaffirini regulates certain sales and solicitations by children and provides a penalty for violations.

\* HB 341 by McCall and Nelson authorizes an employer to disclose information about a current or former employee's job performance to a prospective employer at the request of the prospective employer or employee. An employer is immune from civil liability for that dis-

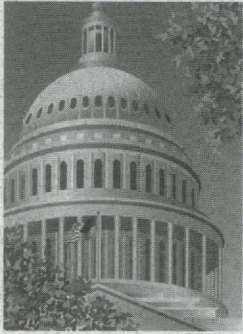
closure or any damages caused by that disclosure unless it is proven that the information was known by the employer to be false or was made with malice or in reckless disregard for the truth.

\* HB 1324 by Garcia and Carona forbids the termination of an employee for performing jury duty and provides civil and criminal penalties for its violation. A person who is injured because of such a violation is entitled to reinstatement of his or her former position and to damages in an amount not less than one year's nor more than five year's compensation.

\* SB 174 by Ratliff and Junell codifies certain state employment matters currently prescribed by the General Appropriations Act.

\* SB 335 by Sibley and Solis provides that a claimant for unemployment benefits is ineligible during a benefit period in which the claimant works the claimant's customary full-time hours, without regard to amount of earnings. This is a federal requirement.

The 76th Legislative Session was positive for TWC and its mission to promote and support a workforce system that offers individuals, employers, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.



# Texas Implements Workforce Investment Act One Year Early

On July 1, 1999, Texas launched its implementation of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Texas was one of the few states to implement on the earliest possible date before the July 1, 2000 deadline. All states should benefit from the increased flexibility offered under WIA, and the greater flexibility should improve services for workers.

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House Bill 1863, enacted by the Texas Legislature in 1995, reformed the state's workforce and welfare systems and allowed areas to form local workforce development boards to meet the needs of employers and workers. The state based its system on local control, customer choice and increased effectiveness—principles reflected in the new federal law. Congress recognized the great strides made by Texas in the development of its workforce system and specifically provided for the state to continue its current policies and activities. As a

result, job seekers will be able to use the more than 100 local workforce centers statewide, each of which provide a seamless system of training and employment services.

Workforce centers are a community resource that individuals can use to enhance their career success. Anyone who walks in the door will have access to "core services" that include job search and placement assistance, labor market information, information on training providers and unemployment insurance. Job seekers who do not have the skills necessary to secure employment immediately may receive "intensive services", including a comprehensive assessment of skills and service needs, development of an individual employment plan, counseling, case management and training. Individuals eligible for training will receive Individual Training Accounts to pay for the cost of training. From a list of eligible training providers, customers will be able to choose the program that best meet their career needs.

Local boards oversee the centers and make decisions on services for their local communities. In addition, to help implement WIA, seven Texas agencies representing education, social services and workforce development signed an agreement with TWC to share information, coordinate planning and promote similar agreements at the local level.

WIA, in combination with Wagner-Peyser Employment

Services, presents an opportunity to further develop the integration of services, eliminate programmatic distinctions in workforce centers, enhance customer choice, increase provider accountability, and most of all, help more Texans find jobs. TWC's ultimate goal is to create a seamless system that all Texans will find easy to access and use.

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Because Texas has been a national leader in workforce development for many years, the state is positioned to continue to be a role model with the early implementation of WIA. For more information on the implementation of WIA or to access the list of training providers in your area that are certified for WIA funding, please visit TWC's website at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us>.

# Developing a State Strategy For Incumbent Worker Training

Research suggests that training currently being provided to workers may not be sufficient to ensure a workforce with the skills needed to foster economic growth and improve living standards.

In today's global economy, workers are increasingly at risk of being dislocated because of changes in technology, downsizing and increased competition. Investing public resources to support training before workers are dislocated is effective for both business and labor. Through significant and continuous investment in education and training, employees are provided long-term career skills. Incumbent worker training assists business by contributing to increased productivity and overall competitiveness.

TWC recently received a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) planning grant to develop a state-wide strategy for incumbent worker training. To assist in the formulation of the strategy, a steering committee has been formed comprised of representatives of the various stakeholder groups interested and involved in training currently employed individuals. Members include representatives of organized labor, local workforce development boards, training providers, community colleges, state government and business.

The federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) allows for the development of an incumbent worker training program. States

are provided the flexibility to establish policies and definitions to determine which workers are eligible for incumbent worker services; an incumbent worker does not necessarily have to meet the eligibility requirements for intensive and training services for employed adults and dislocated workers as defined in WIA.

Texas' Strategic Five-Year State Workforce Investment Plan notes the use of incumbent worker training both as part of the assessment of the Texas economic environment and in strategies for improvement. Once state guidelines are established, local boards will have the freedom to customize current worker training programs within that framework. TWC plans to fund local initiatives out of its WIA state-wide activities budget.

Recently, the National Governors' Association's Center for Best Practices convened focus groups as part of an incumbent worker training project funded by DOL. Government officials, researchers, educators and consultants, as well as representatives from business, industry and organized labor, participated in the focus groups. Participants suggested several principles to guide public policymakers' decisions to invest public resources in incumbent worker training.

\* Government should serve as an enabler and a catalyst, not as a provider of training.

\* Public resources should be used to leverage private sector investment and create incentives

for firms to invest in their workers, not to supplant private training dollars.

\* Strategies to enable training need to be flexible, varied and comprehensive.

\* Strategies need to serve multiple firms and respond to both the customers and the suppliers in the training marketplace.

\* Training must be valued by employers as a strategy to accomplish their business objectives and achieve economic competitiveness, and by employees as a strategy to positively affect their current jobs and achieve their economic and career goals.

\* Training should be tailored to the learning needs and styles of each worker and to the business needs of each firm.

\* Learning must be recognized as the desired result and training as the means to achieve that result.

\* Training should be provided at all levels of the firm to be most effective, as the goal is to create a learning organization.

Because public investment in training can improve the economic security and quality of life of individuals and their communities, TWC is pleased to be involved in developing a state strategy for incumbent worker training.

Please direct comments or questions to Bill Jeffers, TWC, 101 E. 15th St., Room 116-T, Austin, Texas, 78778, or [bill.jeffers@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:bill.jeffers@twc.state.tx.us).

# HIRE TEXAS

A new development at the Texas Workforce Commission makes access to employment services as convenient as the nearest personal computer. HIRE TEXAS, the new Internet-based job matching system, is now available online for use by workers and employers alike. The system matches job-seeker skills with employer needs and allows applicants to perform customized job searches against specific criteria. An individual looking for work or seeking a better job electronically enters his or her application, which is then matched with existing employer job orders.

This convenient, user-friendly system is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and can be accessed from any Internet access point. Trained staff are available in every Workforce Center to assist customers lacking computer skills and/or Internet experience.

More than 400,000 job orders are posted to the job matching system each year and at least 1.4 million applications are on file. Since going online with the job matching system, approximately 1,700 applications and 250 job orders are submitted via the Internet weekly. An analysis of the first 1,000 applications showed that 70% of the applicants have at least two years of college education and 34% have at least four years of college education. At least 50% of the job orders require two or more years of college.

Job seekers can access the system through the TWC website at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us>, under the "Job Listings" link, or through links from local workforce development board websites. No password or user ID is required for job seeker functions and the service is free of charge. Job seekers unfamiliar with Internet use can continue to use Texas Workforce Centers to assist them in the completion of their applications.

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Official business  
Penalty for private use, \$300

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## Toll-Free Phone Number:

1-800-832-2829

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