

## ***Growing Our Future Workforce***

By: DWD Secretary-Designee Caleb Frostman

My face flushes and my palms sweat as I get hit with question after question. I'm under attack and I can't stop the interrogation. I level my gaze at each reporter as they ask hard-hitting questions: "What's your favorite thing to do?" "What did you want to be when you were a kid?" "Do you ever get to talk to Tony Evers?"

For the most part, I'm able to keep my cool. It doesn't hurt that I'm about two decades older and 3- to 4-feet taller than the people lobbing questions my way. It also doesn't hurt that these questions are during "Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day" at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD).

Throughout the day, state employees introduced their kids, grandkids, nieces, and nephews to career options within state government and beyond. As I participated in organized sessions with them, including on the importance of a free and independent press, I was impressed and inspired by the intelligence, creativity, and energy of the next generation.

It reminded me of how crucial it is for Wisconsin to harness that energy to retain and attract the next generation of our state's economic participants. As a recently released report by Forward Analytics emphasized, Wisconsin doesn't have enough young people to replace retiring baby boomers, nor does it have enough people moving into the state to fill our job openings. Those concerns, combined with declining birthrates, both nationally and within Wisconsin, will stall labor force growth for years to come.

Under Governor Evers' leadership, DWD is prioritizing programs that address both our current and future labor needs. We are focusing efforts to recruit and upskill those who are underemployed or face barriers to employment through our re-entry programming for the formerly incarcerated and providing more opportunities for disabled youth to develop valuable workplace skills. We are also continuing to fund and strengthen the Fast Forward program to build transferable skills and lift entire industries, benefitting Wisconsin's economic strength and resilience now and into the future.

We are also boosting programs that inform our young people about career opportunities here in the state that may encourage them to stay. Youth Apprenticeship allows high school students to explore a potential career path through a real paying job. Program participation has doubled over the past five years, with almost 5,000 youth participating in 2019 in occupations ranging from manufacturing and construction to finance and marketing. About three-fourths of participants continue working for their employer sponsor after completing the program.

Addressing the issue of attracting more residents to Wisconsin, Gov. Evers is investing in the quality of our communities, which is what most directly affects attraction and retention. When considering a move to the state, workers, business owners, and entrepreneurs ask questions: What is the quality of your schools? Is child care available? Is it affordable? Are the roads drivable? Is the internet connection adequate to stream Netflix? How about to upload a marketing video to my company's website? Is the water safe to drink?

The answers to these questions will determine how successful Wisconsin will be in attracting and retaining the best and brightest in the years to come.

While the state does its part to attract more workers to Wisconsin and offers training to meet workers' and employers' needs, I ask you to do your part too by talking to Wisconsin's youth about why you chose to relocate to or stay in our state. Chances are, you'll have plenty to talk about.