

Where Have All the Workers Gone?

Lt. Governor Phil Scott

I've lived and worked in Vermont all my life. It isn't always easy, and it seems to get harder every day, but there's nowhere else I'd rather be. I've witnessed many historic events, the evolving landscape, and the lives of my fellow Vermonters.

But something has changed. I've noticed it at the company I am co owner of, Dubois Construction, and I know many other small-business owners have as well: When we do have open job positions, barely anybody is applying for them. Where are the young people who want to drive trucks, operate equipment, and repair our crumbling infrastructure? The answer is... we're in short supply.

Our population is stagnant and our demographics are shifting. Between the 2000 and 2010 census, Vermont lost 30,000 people between the ages of 25 and 45. That's our workforce. Those are our primary taxpayers. Those are the people who would be applying for these jobs. We're hearing a lot of talk lately about Vermont's second-lowest-in-the-nation unemployment rate, and while that's good news, it's not the whole story. Our unemployment rate isn't going down simply because more Vermonters have joined the workforce; it's also going down because many Vermonters have *left* the workforce. Between April of 2010 and April of 2014, our state's workforce shrunk by 9,600 people. They're either aging out of the workforce, moving to other states, or simply giving up on trying to find a job.

Fewer employees and fewer businesses mean fewer sources of tax revenue, which ratchets up the cost of living and doing business for everyone. It's a vicious cycle, and it isn't one that we can afford to tax our way out of. The only solution is to find ways to grow the economy, create more, good paying jobs, and make living and working in Vermont a viable option for our younger residents.

It isn't going to be easy but we do it in our businesses every single day and I think we have a real opportunity to turn some things around if we elect like-minded people into the legislature. We need to work together and prioritize legislation in order to make Vermont a more affordable and prosperous place for our children and grandchildren to live and call home.