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## Lowering Apprentices Ratio Good for Industry

Wisconsin faces an impending shortage of workers in the skilled trades that will only be exacerbated as the baby boomer generation nears retirement. This issue has been well-documented, [with 500,000 openings nationwide in construction trades alone](#). A June 2016 survey by the National Association of Homebuilders found that 68% of builders and 78% of subcontractors reported a shortage of workers, and a [recent survey from the Associated General Contractors found that 70% of contractors are having difficulty finding workers](#).

With an expected flurry of activity around the state as the result of proposed Foxconn investment, the need for skilled workers is more evident than ever. However, there is a major bottleneck that prevents these workers from entering the workforce: Wisconsin's mandated apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio.

This ratio mandates that a certain number of journeyworkers be employed for each apprentice hired. While this number varies by trade, it has proven to be a major roadblock for employers and their ability to hire the necessary workers to meet existing demand. Between the pending worker shortages and the limiting ratio requirements, small and medium sized contractors face an uphill battle to find additional workers.

Apprenticeships offer great opportunities for future generations to develop meaningful careers that allow them to "earn while they learn." In fact, a typical UW-Madison undergrad student will spend more than \$48,000 on tuition and books over a four year period, while the average apprentice will earn over \$161,000 over a five year apprenticeship period. On top of that, the average apprentice will likely earn an equivalent, or better, salary than someone who graduates with a bachelor's degree.

Recognizing the value that apprenticeships provide, Representative Rob Hutton (R-Brookfield) and I introduced a bill last week that would set a standard apprentice-to-journeyworker ratio of 1:1 across the board. This will ensure that Wisconsin contractors will have the ability to hire additional apprentices and fill open positions, while maintaining a safety standard that is recognized by many states across the nation. The impact could more than double the allowable apprentices in a majority of the construction trades, which is necessary to meet existing demand.

Wisconsin has made great strides over the past six years to encourage the importance of work and lower barriers for individuals seeking gainful employment. As we head into Labor Day weekend we should celebrate the value and power that meaningful work brings to our families and communities. This bill is yet another reform to help people achieve the American dream by ensuring that government is not getting in the way of opportunity.

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