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Focus Should Be On Short-term Training, Skills Development to Meet Anticipated Workforce Needs, State Residents Say;

Concerns About Economy Continue, Along with Overall Uncertainty About Future

As policymakers look to grow the state's workforce to meet the employment needs of major employers, respondents to a recent survey would prefer that Connecticut provide short-term training, skills development and certificate programs, rather than expanding K-12 or college offerings or investing in amenities to attract out-of-state workers with needed skills.

Nearly half of state residents - 49% - described short-term training and skills development as their "preferred option" for the state and its education partners to expand the state's workforce, according to the latest InformCT Consumer Confidence Survey. That was the top choice among every category of state residents by employment status surveyed – those employed full-time, employed part-time, unemployed and seeking a job, unemployed and not currently looking, and retirees.

Percentages who expressed that preference ranged from 43% to 56% in the various employment categories. The highest percentage preferring an expansion of K-12 and college offerings was 39% of those currently employed part-time. Actions to attract out-of-state workers was preferred by less than 20% in three of the five employment categories; the highest level of support, 31%, came from those currently unemployed but not looking for work.

InformCT is a public-private partnership that provides independent, non-partisan research, analysis, and public outreach to help create fact-based dialogue and action in Connecticut. The survey, conducted quarterly since the start of 2015, is administered by researchers from the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc. The latest survey results are for the second quarter of 2019.

"Connecticut residents can best be described as uneasy. They're feeling better in some ways, but not in others. They have a definite preference of how the state should help fill jobs that may be coming, and their own personal financial situation is looking up," said Alissa DeJonge, Vice President of Research at the Connecticut Economic Resource Center. "But they're less sure of the state's economic prospects and whether they'll stick around, even as they say the job picture has brightened."

Impressions of Connecticut Continue to Decline, But More Feel Financially Better Than Before

For the fourth consecutive quarter, the percentage of survey respondents who indicated agreement with the statement "Connecticut is a good place to live and raise a family" has dropped. It now stands at 44%, down from 47% in the previous quarter and 55% in the second quarter of 2018. It is also the lowest percentage since the survey was initiated in the first quarter of 2015.

In addition, the percentage of respondents who indicated it was likely they would be moving out of Connecticut within the next five years was the highest it has ever been – tying the fourth quarter of 2018 at 47% - nearly half of survey respondents.

Yet residents also shared positive views of the state's economic progress and their individual financial circumstances.

The highest percentage since the survey began say that from a personal financial standpoint, they feel they're better off today than six months ago – 35% have that view, compared to 23% who feel they're worse off. That's opposite from the first quarter of this year – just three months ago - when 33% said they were worse off, and only 26% said they were better off. Looking ahead, 43% said they expected to be better off in six months, compared to 16% who expect they'll be worse off financially. That comparison was 37%-18% in the first quarter; there is more optimism and less pessimism regarding personal finances.

Optimism on Jobs, Business, with Lingering Uncertainty

Nearly three-quarters – 73% – think business conditions are better or the same as six months ago, a slight tick upward since the previous quarter. The number of respondents who believe there are plenty of jobs for anyone who wants to work (compared with six months ago) increased this quarter over last, as did the percentage (59%) who agree with the statement “there are some jobs but not enough compared with six months ago.” The percentage who say that jobs are very hard to get in Connecticut is 16% - the lowest it has been since the quarterly survey began in 2015.

Three in 10 respondents agree that the Connecticut economy is improving – the highest percentage since 31% shared that view a year ago and 33% did in the first quarter of 2015. However, 42% continue to disagree, although that percentage is down slightly from 43% a year ago and 44% in the previous quarter.

The survey also found a range of concerns on the minds of state residents:

- 56% are concerned about being able to afford health insurance (down from 59% a year ago).
- 33% are concerned about their job or that of their partner/spouse in in jeopardy (virtually unchanged from last quarter and last year). An identical percentage, 33%, is unsure.
- 49% believe they will not have enough money to retire comfortably (down from 25% in the previous quarter but up from 22% a year ago).

On questions of consumer spending, respondents indicated that in the next six months:

- 67% said it was likely they'd take a vacation outside of Connecticut, the same percentage as a year ago
- 38% anticipate making a major consumer expenditure, such as furniture (down 2 percentage points from a year ago)
- 27% expect to purchase a car (down 3 percentage points from a year ago)
- 20% anticipate refinancing a home or purchasing a new home (the highest level since 4th quarter, 2016)

The online survey of 505 state residents, conducted in late June 2019, has a margin of error of 4 percent.

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