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## Worker training program must expand

On Sept. 28, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed Executive Order 11246. In so doing, he advanced a revolutionary cause by stating clearly that, "It is the policy of the government of the United States to provide equal opportunity in federal employment for all qualified persons, to prohibit discrimination in employment because of race, creed, color or national origin, and to promote the full realization of equal employment opportunity through a positive, continuing program in each executive department and agency."

The foundation for the advancement of equality was laid in the neighborhoods and communities across this nation and built upon by presidents who understood that the time had come to rectify the compromises that were made during the formation of the United States.

In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt prohibited government contractors from engaging in employment discrimination. In 1948, President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces. President John F. Kennedy organized the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity in 1961, and President Lyndon Johnson championed the cause to its penultimate moment



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*Commentary*

with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

While Executive Order 11246 stated the federal government's intent, the order and those involved in its implementation acknowledged that individuals who had been deprived because of discrimination needed access to training and education to become "qualified persons." In Indiana, that training came in 1970 with the formation of the Indiana Plan.

Initially, the mission of the Indiana Plan was to provide basic construction training to minorities and women in order to increase their numbers in construction trades. Over time, organizers realized that, to ensure the long-term success of its participants, basic adult education in fields such as mathematics was needed, as were life skills, such as personal budgeting. Today, each trainee is assessed as part of the program to identify educational needs, which are addressed in the curriculum and through 100 hours of classroom training.

Since 1970, about 300 minorities and women have enrolled in these apprenticeship programs each year. At no cost to the students, they are provided educational, professional and personal skills at facilities in Indianapolis, Gary, Fort Wayne, South Bend and Evansville. They are also provided with the actual tools they will need to start their careers.

Annually, roughly 10 percent of enrollees matriculate into careers that can lead them into the middle class. Skilled construction workers can earn \$25 per hour or more, and multiple inde-

pendent studies are projecting continued growth in the Indiana construction industry over the next five years. The demand for the Indiana Plan apprenticeship program exceeds its instructional capacity.

The Indiana Plan is the only remaining "hometown plan" in the country organized under the auspices of President Johnson's 1965 executive order. Since then, hundreds of men and women have transitioned from transient worker status to full-time, career-minded individuals. The Indiana Plan's network of inner-city agencies and churches across the state ensures that the limited number of apprenticeship positions are awarded to those least fortunate but most willing and desirous of becoming productive, contributing members of society.

The Indiana Plan has performed admirably in providing the skills needed for economic and social success to hundreds of women and minorities. Unfortunately, over time, its contributions to the betterment of our community have been obscured by the economic and social changes around us. Regrettably, those changes have not eliminated the need for programs like the Indiana Plan. It is time to renew Indiana's investment in the Indiana Plan. The dividends it pays provide Indiana with a very healthy return on investment. •

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