



# COUNCILMEMBER SHERRI S. LIGHTNER

*CITY OF SAN DIEGO – COUNCIL DISTRICT 1*

## Press Release

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### Lightner Launches ‘Connecting to Careers’ Initiative

*Focus on closing San Diego’s workforce skills gap*

SAN DIEGO – San Diego is grappling with a skills gap.

While San Diego’s unemployment is at 9.3 percent, there are almost 57,000 unfilled jobs as employers struggle to find qualified workers for in-demand occupations.

The divide means companies have a harder time expanding because it is costly and time-consuming to recruit from outside the region. It also frustrates San Diegans who are looking for meaningful work only to discover they are not qualified for available jobs in their own community.

To better prepare San Diego’s workforce now and in the future, Councilmember Sherri Lightner is spearheading “Connecting to Careers,” an initiative designed to bring all stakeholders together to highlight the city’s workforce training needs.

Lightner, who chairs the newly created Council Committee on Economic Development and Strategies, said closing the skills gap is a key component to ensuring a strong local economy.

“We need to work together to get San Diegans working,” said Lightner. “Too often there is a disconnect between the public, training providers, educational institutions and our local businesses when it comes to what job skills we need to foster.”

Connecting to Careers is about starting a dialogue so that education and training programs better match up with actual job demand.

To start that conversation, Lightner – joined by Council President Tony Young and Councilmember Lorie Zapf – today hosted a roundtable discussion with some of San Diego’s biggest employers along with representatives from San Diego State University, UC San Diego, San Diego Community College District and San Diego Workforce Partnership, which funds a wide variety of training programs in the region.

Mark Cafferty, president and CEO of the San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation, said the skills gap is very real and needs to be addressed with a collaborative approach. Right now, labor market data often lacks specifics, he said. For instance, it may be obvious that computer specialists are in demand, but what types of specialists and what specific skills they need often is not.

“It is critical that we improve communication between companies, our schools and training providers regarding their current and future job needs, so that they will have the right type of employees to grow their businesses,” Cafferty said.

Council President Tony Young, who sits on the Workforce Partnership Board, said the city should focus on all aspects of workforce development from improving K-12 education to retraining unemployed or underemployed workers for jobs in growing industries.

“Councilmember Lightner is rightly putting a spotlight on one of San Diego’s most pressing needs – workforce training,” Young said. “A well-trained and educated workforce means it is easier to retain, grow and attract companies here.”

Nathaniel Buggs, interim president and CEO of the San Diego Workforce Partnership, said his organization is there to help facilitate the conversation by providing critical labor market information.

“Our research allows us to inform the region in the right way at the right time,” said Buggs. “Looking at workforce data is essential in making decisions, whether we’re looking at emerging industry clusters or critical staffing needs.”

Joe Panetta, president and CEO of BIOCOM, said his organization has worked hard to craft a workforce initiative for the life science industry that can help serve as a model for other industries.

"BIOCOM has bridged the employment gap for veterans and displaced workers in the greater San Diego region by formalizing the connections with community college and university education/training and career pathways in biotechnology, industrial biotech and the life sciences."

As part of the Connecting to Careers initiative, Lightner will be sponsoring a number of events in the coming year, including a training fair this summer. The event will highlight both the most in-demand skills as well as connect students and job seekers with the proper training and educational programs.

Lightner also will host a series of “Skills Sessions,” stakeholder panels focused on growing industry sectors such as biotech, cleantech and manufacturing that will help identify current skills gaps and develop programs and curriculum to address those gaps.

Lightner hopes to collaborate with the Workforce Partnership and the EDC to create a website that serves as a one-stop shop where students and job seekers can find out about the most in-demand jobs and all available training programs.

“Right now, there are all these great programs out there that many in community know nothing about,” she said. “We need to make it easier for San Diegans to find out about the skills they need and how to attain them. It’s a simple but important step in closing the skills gap.”

*Sherri Lightner is the Councilmember for Council District One of the City of San Diego, which includes the communities of Black Mountain Ranch, Carmel Valley, Del Mar Mesa, La Jolla, Pacific Highlands Ranch, Rancho Peñasquitos, Torrey Hills, Torrey Highlands, Torrey Pines, and University City. She took office December 8, 2008.*

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