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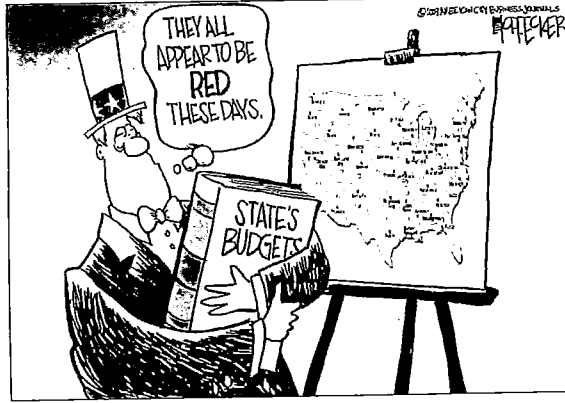
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| BUSINESS VIEW |

Crucial need for teen jobs

Employment opportunities for youths ages 16-19 in the U.S. have collapsed to record lows in the past year. Fewer than 30 percent of the nation's teens have been working in recent months, versus 46 percent in 2000 and nearly 50 percent in 1989.

Here in Massachusetts, teen employment rates also have declined considerably over the past eight years. Between January and March of this year, only 28 percent of the state's teens were employed, a new historic low for the state, with low-income youth and minority youth faring the worst.

There are many reasons to care about rising joblessness for teens. Getting young people into the job market early is essential to building good work habits and employability skills.

Path dependency is strong in teen employment behavior. Teens who work more in high school have an easier transition into the job market after graduation and earn more through their mid-20s. Disadvantaged teens who work in high school are more likely to remain in high school than their peers who do not work.

Unfortunately, the state Legislature last week cut funding for teen jobs and internships by more than 50 percent, which will affect some 10,000 teen jobs across the state, many in private sector firms. Due to declines in state revenues, cuts have been made to both the Connecting Activities and the YouthWorks programs. Both of these programs have helped provide much-needed jobs for teens in large numbers, including those with educational and economical disadvantages.

Last year, more than 14,700 high school students were pro-

vided internships through Connecting Activities with more than 5,000 employers across the state, including Brigham and Women's Hospital, Liberty Mutual and Citizens Bank. These opportunities were in a wide array of for-profit companies, including many industries where teens are substantially under-represented.

Last summer, YouthWorks provided employment to 4,260 low-income youths across Massachusetts for summer jobs in the public, nonprofit and private sectors. Research over the past two decades has shown that year-round jobs provide more substantial long-term employment and earnings gains for high school teens.

This year YouthWorks would have operated year round.

The recession has taken a toll on job opportunities for everyone. Since teen employment typically trails the recovery of economic activity by at least two years, teen employment will not likely begin to recover to any substantive degree until 2012, generating large losses in their preparation for the world of work. The governor should prioritize these investments in our young people's future in the fiscal 2010 budget with the use of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. Using federal stimulus dollars today to prepare our youth for the labor market of the future is a valuable use of such monies. Our entire economy will benefit from teens developing good work experience and work habits today.

ANDREW SUM is director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. **DON GILLIS** is executive director of the Massachusetts Workforce Board Association.

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