

Outsourcing doesn't affect Nevada as much as other states

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

For months, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has blocked consideration of any free trade agreement until Congress first approves a federal program to help retrain U.S. workers whose jobs are outsourced.

"I've told Sen. McConnell, I've told the president, I've told anyone who will listen. I told Speaker Boehner. There will be no trade agreements unless trade adjustment assistance passes," Reid said, referring to the program last week.

Reid's distrust of free trade agreements runs deep: He's said often that he doesn't think they're fair, and that in pressing for Congress to take up treaties to remove trade barriers without offering displaced workers some compensation, Republicans "are more concerned about what jobs are being created in Colombia or Panama or Korea than what are being created here in America."

Trade-related outsourcing is a real concern for many states, but the impact in Nevada is small.

Trade adjustment assistance, or TAA, is offered to workers who have been hurt by competition from imports, or by companies moving their U.S. operations to a foreign country with which the U.S. has a free-trade agreement.

Last fiscal year, almost 16,000 displaced workers in Pennsylvania were certified to receive the benefits.

In Nevada, there were 63.

In fiscal 2009, when the recession hit and companies all over the country started to shed jobs, the Labor Department certified employees of 199 Michigan-based workplaces as eligible for TAA assistance.

In the same fiscal year in Nevada, the Labor Department certified five companies. The year before, it certified one; six employees received benefits.

In fact, through the past decade Nevada has ranked among the bottom handful of states for workers seeking such assistance.

“There’s not much going on there for Nevada’s economy,” said Elliott Parker, chairman of the UNR economics department and a professor of international trade. “When Sen. Reid makes that argument, he’s thinking about it on a national scale and not a state scale ... The truth is, Nevada does not have much of a history of a manufacturing base, and that is the area that has been harder hit by free-trade agreements.”

In other words, Nevada’s 13.4 percent unemployment may be the worst the nation, but it isn’t because foreigners have been picking off our jobs.

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