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With proper federal funding, Michigan can lead the way on job training

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The \$4 billion in stimulus aid targeted specifically for job training couldn't come at a more critical time for Michigan.

Whatever the state's slice of the pie, it could be a deciding factor in whether Michigan accelerates or merely sustains the momentum behind the state's vital No Worker Left Behind program.

Started two years, the program is Michigan's attempt to cover the costs of re-educating 100,000 displaced workers. Workers who sign up for courses on a state-approved list are eligible for up to \$10,000 a year in tuition costs and job placement assistance.

The state allocates \$15 million from its general fund for the program. But in her recent budget proposal, Granholm made no general fund request for the program. It's a sign of both the state's economic decline and Granholm's faith in President Barack Obama's pledge to strengthen workforce readiness. As of January, 51,742 displaced workers had enrolled in training courses offered by nonprofits, community colleges and four-year universities.

Hopefully, the governor has pleaded a convincing case for economic favoritism. The pain Michigan has endured as it shed 625,000 jobs since 2000 ought to factor highly into the Obama plan to create 3.7 million jobs. Why not designate Michigan as ground zero, the face of America's job-training renewal?

To reach such a height, Michigan would need enough federal aid to double, maybe triple, the scope of its No Worker Left Behind program. The state's bulging unemployment rolls clearly justify the demand. And Michigan's able network of community colleges, training schools and universities have track records to prove they can prepare and supply the types of skilled workers who can be useful to both the state and federal economies.

If Granholm has done her job as advocate, no state will be as stimulated by federal retraining assistance than the thousands of workers here who need help now.