

[MORNING NEWS](#)
[St. Louis Public Radio](#)
[LIVE NOW](#)
[MY PLAYLIST](#)



DONATE

NATIONAL

< Trump wants to reach 1 million apprenticeships. Arkansas is jumpstarting the effort

MARCH 3, 2026 · 4:41 AM ET

4-Minute Listen

PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT



DOWNLOAD

EMBED

LEILA FADEL, HOST:

President Trump wants to see a boom in apprenticeships - a million more in the next few years. The Labor Department has asked Arkansas to lead the way. NPR's Andrea Hsu reports.

ANDREA HSU, BYLINE: I'm at Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock. This is Machining II. The instructor, Matt Walrond, is demonstrating how to cut through an aluminum tube.

(SOUNDBITE OF MACHINERY WHIRRING)

MATT WALROND: What I also like to do when I very first start, we'll do a little bit of wax on the blade.

HSU: There are four students in this class. Two of them are apprentices from Virco Manufacturing. It's a school furniture maker half an hour away. Caleb Moss (ph) works at the plant part of the week and comes here on Tuesdays and Thursdays for hands-on learning, which he loves. After all...

CALEB MOSS: When you go to work, you're not going to be in a book doing this stuff. You're going to be on the machine running it.

HSU: And Matt Walrond loves how immediately Moss can turn lessons into practice.

WALROND: Sometimes I would teach him something, and he would come back the next week and say, I got to use what we just did.

HSU: This partnership came about last year. Virco had been struggling to find skilled machinists after losing longtime employees to retirement. A manager reached out to Pulaski Tech for help, and the school turned to Apprenticely. That's a nonprofit that's helped launch several thousand apprenticeships in Arkansas in recent years. Their national apprenticeship director, Lonnie Emard, is familiar with the problem and the solution. He says all over the state, there are people who see a chasm between themselves and good jobs.

LONNIE EMARD: They see those jobs, but they don't know how to get there.

HSU: Their resume's not getting them in the door. They don't have the right experience.

EMARD: At the same time, we're talking to those employers who are on the other side of that chasm, and they see nobody.

HSU: Emard has been urging employers across industries to consider candidates who don't check all the boxes, who might not have the right degree or any degree.

EMARD: People were looking at that going, Lonnie, come on. You're asking us to settle for something less than what I really wanted. And I said, no, we're not asking for that.

HSU: He tells them, look, as long as someone's got the essential qualities, like an aptitude for math or a knack for problem-solving, the technical pieces can be taught. Plus, he argues, investing in training often leads to more productive, more loyal employees.

EMARD: They're going to have a future, and they're going to stay.

HSU: Now, Arkansas is a small state with some 3 million people, but it's growing apprenticeships at a fast clip, including in manufacturing. The Labor Department told NPR that's why it chose Arkansas to spearhead a national effort to grow apprenticeships in manufacturing. To be clear, Arkansas didn't apply for this role.

The government came to the state with nearly \$36 million to run something called...

CODY WAITS: The American Manufacturing Apprenticeship Incentive Fund.

HSU: Cody Waits leads Arkansas' division of Workforce Connections, which is overseeing the initiative. He explains manufacturers anywhere in the U.S. can get \$3,500 for each new apprenticeship they create, provided it's a registered apprenticeship, meaning it meets government standards. The incentive is paid to the employer once the apprentice passes the 90-day mark. Already, Waits has been busy fielding calls from all over the country.

WAITS: West Coast to East Coast, South, North, Midwest, all across the board.

HSU: Now, setting up a registered apprenticeship isn't the easiest thing. Actually, it's a bear. There's a ton of paperwork and record-keeping. That's one reason companies haven't been interested. More often it's groups like Apprenticely or unions or community colleges who do all the work to make it happen. Such groups are expected to play a sizable role in this experiment, although most of the incentive money will still go to the employer. How Cody Waits sees it, the money may be just what a company needs to get on board.

WAITS: Every little bit of interest helps.

HSU: Now, at best, this \$36 million fund could lead to around 10,000 new manufacturing apprenticeships. The Labor Department is in the process of creating a handful of similar funds to incentivize apprenticeships in other high-priority sectors like health care, IT, shipbuilding and defense. The investments are modest, but Cody Waits believes there could be a snowball effect. Already, Virco, the school furniture maker, says it wants to create 20 new apprenticeships - up from just two.

WAITS: Think about how many Vircos there may be across the country.

HSU: Replicate that kind of growth, he says, and eventually, President Trump's goal of 1 million apprenticeships might just be possible.

Andrea Hsu, NPR News, Little Rock.

Copyright © 2026 NPR. All rights reserved. Visit our website terms of use and permissions pages at www.npr.org for further information.

Accuracy and availability of NPR transcripts may vary. Transcript text may be revised to correct errors or match updates to audio. Audio on npr.org may be edited after its original broadcast or publication. The authoritative record of NPR's programming is the audio record.

More Stories From NPR



IMMIGRATION

Top DHS spokesperson who became a face of Trump immigration policy is leaving



BUSINESS

Women are getting most of the new jobs. What's going on with men?



UP FIRST FROM NPR

Women in the Skilled Trades Face New Hurdles : Up First from NPR



POLITICS

Conservatives and liberals oppose H2A visa changes for immigrant farm workers



NATIONAL

Data centers are expensive, unpopular — and could be a tipping point in the midterms



NATIONAL SECURITY

In Pentagon briefings, Hegseth leans into religious rhetoric

READ & LISTEN

Home

News

Culture

CONNECT

Newsletters

Facebook

Instagram

Music

Podcasts & Shows

Press

Public Editor

Corrections

Transcripts

Contact & Help

ABOUT NPR

Overview

Diversity

NPR Network

Accessibility

Ethics

Finances

GET INVOLVED

Support Public Radio

Sponsor NPR

NPR Careers

NPR Shop

NPR Extra

terms of use

privacy

your privacy choices

text only

© 2026 npr