

## Keeping baby boomers involved

### Aging work force topic of Statehouse meeting

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CONCORD — Public officials, nonprofit executives and public policy advocates met at the Statehouse Thursday for an in-depth discussion about New Hampshire's aging work force, the looming challenges posed by baby-boomer retirement and ways to make it easier for older Americans to remain engaged in their communities.

As a growing number of Americans approach traditional retirement age, changes in public policy are necessary to allow many to continue working or volunteering.

"The baby boomers represent the most active, healthy and educated of their age in the history of the United States," said U.S. Sen. Harris Wofford, who helped organize the Peace Corps in 1961 and now leads Experience Wave, a campaign supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies, working in Congress and state legislatures to advance the interests of mid-life and older workers and volunteers. "Their desire to stay involved presents a greater opportunity for businesses, nonprofits, communities, and the federal and state governments. In fact, we cannot afford to miss this opportunity to engage experienced older workers in continued employment and civic service."

Baby boomers, or people born between 1946 and 1964, represent over ¼ of the U.S. population. On Jan. 1, 2008, the first of the boomers will turn 62 and be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits.

With ten, 20 or more healthy and productive years, the baby boomers have time to make significant contributions in education, health care, nonprofit, government and other sectors that are essential to the nation's well-being.

"Our state's workforce is the backbone of our economy," said N.H. State Rep. Mary Stuart Gile, Ed.D., chairwoman of the Legislative Task Force on Work and Family. "As older employees reach retirement age, we have to create opportunities to keep them actively involved with our businesses, nonprofits and communities."

A new report from Boston College detailing statistics on the New Hampshire work force was issued at the event. One in four New Hampshire workers, like the country as a whole, are over 55 years old. The top three industries employing the highest percentage of workers ages 50 to 59 include computer and electronic product manufacturing (35 percent), social services (34.2 percent) and transportation equipment manufacturing (32.8 percent).

In order to take advantage of this potential experience dividend, Experience Wave is pressing a legislative agenda in Washington D.C. and several state legislatures. Key solutions include:

- Helping older people finance continuing education to transition to a new career or to sharpen their work skills. This could be accomplished with simple changes in the tax code or allowing workers to save for their own education through "lifelong learning accounts" similar to 401k plans.

- Changing federally funded/state administered programs designed to help people secure jobs and obtain new skills. While designated for people of all ages, in reality, most of these "Workforce Investment Act" programs don't effectively serve older people. Older workers' unique needs and preferences should be considered when redesigning our nation's employment and training programs.
- Creating greater opportunities for older people to engage in meaningful charitable or pro bono work through national service programs and encouraging states to create comprehensive plans to use older people as a resource for addressing social issues such as child and adult literacy.

Fifty-nine percent of people ages 50 and older who plan to retire expect to volunteer for a nonprofit or community organization, according to a recent poll commissioned by Experience Wave. An additional 14 percent plan to get training or learn a new skill for a different career.

More than ¼ of people over 55 years old are still in the workplace. About 40 percent say they plan to keep working for financial reasons.

Wofford urged public officials to get involved with the issue.

"This is the time to ask the presidential candidates and our elected officials to take action and support legislation that will keep Americans engaged in work and civic society," he said.

Experience Wave seeks to advance federal and state policies that will enable the country to seize the opportunities facing us as the unprecedented large number of baby boomers reach traditional retirement age. Experience Wave was established in April 2006 with the support of The Atlantic Philanthropies. For more information, visit [www.experiencewave.org](http://www.experiencewave.org).