

Closing the Gap

CONGRESSMAN TOURS TECH CENTER, SPEAKS WITH STUDENTS AS PART OF HIS RISE TOUR



Jessica Boisclair/Daily Times

Congressman Jim Langevin poses with students from from the culinary, automotive, carpentry, computer IT, cosmetology, graphics, and early childhood education programs at the career and technical school in Coventry during his visit to the school yesterday.

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COVENTRY — Congressman Jim Langevin made his first stop at Coventry High School yesterday after he launched his Rhode Island Skilled Economy (RISE) Tour in hopes of closing the skills gap throughout the state.

Students from the Career and Technical programs at the high school gathered while Langevin explained the impor-

tance of the Perkins Act, job training and how these programs will prepare the students for their careers.

He said that Perkins funding, which has been around for 13 years, is a federal funding source for career and technical education institutions.

During the last two years, Perkins Act funding has been reduced by \$140 million. This funding is used to provide equipment, training and opportunities for students to get the best education in career and

technical fields.

Langevin, who co-chairs the Career and Technical Education Caucus in Washington D.C., has been working to try and restore Perkins Act funding along side Rep. Glenn Thompson from Pennsylvania.

He explained to the students that even though the economy is struggling, everybody needs to increase their efforts to get and create jobs.

He said that there is a disconnect between what is being taught in schools and what

businesses look for when interviewing candidates.

"It's so frustrating to me when I go around the state to businesses, knowing how high our unemployment rate is, and I ask the owners if they are hiring and they say 'yes we're hiring but we can't find the workers with the right skills to do the job,'" he said.

Director of the Regional Career and Technical Center, Lori Ferguson, explained to the Congressman that the students

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Tech students meet Langevin

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preparation for their upcoming jobs.

"Today these kids are taking 24 credits minimum, four years of English and Math," she said. "They're in AP classes and also taking two courses of a training program." Sam Edwards, a student enrolled in the computer electronics program, praised Congressman Langevin for all his work for the programs.

He said that even though all the classes he has taken will help prepare him for the work force, he feels like the requirements from the school towards graduation duplicate the requirements for the career center programs.

He said that since being in a computer program requires many math classes to be taken; those should count towards his graduation requirements and not be a "double dose of work."

Another student in the pro-

gram also expressed his appreciation for the career and technical center.

He explained to Congressman Langevin that when he took his ASVAB test for the Air Force he did so well in the math and science portion that he was accepted right away into the cyber-operations field.

"Even though we try to

broaden the horizons for our students, sometimes the roadblocks we face are outdated equipment or not current software," said Crystal Violette, teacher of the graphic communications program.

Langevin explained that this is exactly what the

Perkins Act funds are used for and why he is fighting to restore some of that funding.

"I'm a big supporter of the STEM fields: science, technology, engineering and mathematics," he said.

Langevin will be continuing his RISE Tour during the next couple of months to businesses and job training facilities throughout the state.

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—Congressman Jim Langevin
