

Congressman Langevin Kicks Off “RISE Tour” at Coventry High School

The tour for a "skilled economy" boasts the announcement of a push for Career and Technical Education funding.

By [Lauren Costa](#) | March 16, 2012



Congressman Jim Langevin (D-RI) launched his “Rhode Island’s Skilled Economy (RISE) Tour” on Thursday to advocate initiatives and create partnerships that will close the skills gap and strengthen the state’s economy.

Beginning at [Coventry High School](#), Langevin, who is co-chair of the Congressional Career and Technical Education (CTE) Caucus, announced his bipartisan initiative to restore funding for the Perkins Act, a major federal funding source for career and technical

education, which prepares over 14 million “college and career-ready” students and displaced workers.

Emphasizing the importance of these resources, Langevin discussed how Rhode Island students will benefit from the program’s focus on providing access to the latest technology, equipment, and training. He met with Regional Career and Technical Education Center Director Lori Ferguson, instructors and students from the culinary, automotive, computer science, graphics, cosmetology and early childhood development programs at the center's Knotty Oak Room that houses the culinary program.

“Career and technical education produces college and career ready students who have been prepared both academically and with real-world experience to succeed in high-wage, high-skilled, and high-demand career fields such as engineering, cyber-security, and health care,” Langevin said. “I have met so many wonderful teachers and administrators like Coventry’s Lori Ferguson across our state, but they can’t do their job unless they have resources for their students and the opportunity to collaborate with local businesses to identify workforce demands and internship opportunities.”

The Perkins Act funding helps Coventry High School keep its supplies up to date and functional for a variety of courses, including kitchen equipment for the culinary program, to ensure students are fully prepared for available jobs. Due to current economic conditions, enrollment across the country in Career and Technical Education programs, which also offer retraining to many adult workers, is at the highest level in over eight years.

"When myself and other members of Congress are in Washington, we want to do things that are relevant and important to the people back home," said Langevin. "Among the things that I've found to be very important is jobs. The economy is struggling right now and it is important to create jobs and get it back on track."

With his fellow co-chair of the CTE caucus, Rep. Glenn “GT” Thompson (R-PA), Langevin is leading the effort in Congress to restore Perkins Act funding to the Fiscal 2010 level. The program was reduced by

\$140 million Fiscal 2011 and further in Fiscal 2012. He and Thompson have rallied colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join them in writing to Democratic and Republican leaders of the House Appropriations Subcommittee that oversees education funding. In requesting \$1.27 billion for the program, they stressed that in a time of fiscal constraints, workforce development must be recognized as a top priority for the country to reach its full economic potential.

"My colleague GT Thompson and I are fighting hard to make sure that we're protecting these programs and getting funding back for them," Langevin said.

"Due to recent cutbacks, high schools, career technical education centers, and community and technical colleges have been put in the unfortunate position of offering fewer services to students who most need education and training," states the letter that is being delivered to Subcommittee Chairman Denny Rehberg (R-MT) and Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) when Congress reconvenes next week. "Perkins can serve to bridge the skills gap and ensure the unemployed and under-employed are qualified to take the jobs that will make our economic recovery viable. If further reductions to Perkins continue, many effective education and employment training opportunities will cease to exist."

The skills gap has been a particularly significant drag on Rhode Island's economy, contributing to the state's persistently high unemployment.

"It's so frustrating to me when I go around the state to businesses and manufacturers and I ask owners if they are hiring and they say they are but they cannot find workers with the right skills to do the job," he said.

"Addressing this problem requires better cooperation between the businesses doing the hiring and the educators preparing the students."

Ferguson, along with several instructors and students also spoke with Langevin about how the career center and regular high school curriculums need to be more intertwined, as many career students find that requirements between the two frequently conflict and cause a burden.

"Is there a possibility of seeing career and technical programs as a different path?" asked Computer IT instructor Ron Guillemette. "We talk about reforming education in a way that benefits kids, but here we have credits that just seem to sit on top of them. Even though we meet the requirements in our programs, they don't match one-to-one when looking at what is required by the state."

Langevin agreed and explained that fortunately there are several local colleges and universities such as New England Tech, URI and CCRI that are currently working on programs that may meld the academic paths more in the near future.

"These are vital skills that we need in our economy," said Langevin to the students. "I want to commend you all for the work that you're doing and I want you to know that it is important. I'm proud of each and every one of you and I have confidence in the future of our state because I have confidence in you."



As he continues his RISE Tour over the coming months, Langevin is asking companies, job training facilities and other organizations that want to be involved to contact his office with ideas for building the partnerships that Rhode Island needs.