

The Honorable Jim Langevin
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Remarks
Investing in Workforce Development
Wednesday, May 1, 2019

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, for the opportunity to testify today. I'd like to highlight an issue that's particularly important to my constituents in Rhode Island and workers and businesses across the country: investing in a skilled infrastructure workforce.

I'm encouraged by your plans to craft robust infrastructure legislation to strengthen our communities and stimulate our economy. But rebuilding our nation's infrastructure will require more than investments in bridges, roads, waterways, and broadband; it will require a workforce that can design, build, and maintain them.

Therefore, as the Committee works to craft its infrastructure agenda over the coming months, I urge you to consider investments in proven workforce development strategies, including career and technical education (CTE) and apprenticeships, to prepare our workers to realize these opportunities ahead of us.

The Brookings Institution estimates that 3 million more workers will be needed to support the nation's infrastructure over the next 10 years, including designing, building and operating transportation, housing, utilities and telecommunications. However, Georgetown University estimates that with a trillion-dollar federal infrastructure investment, we'd more than double the number of required high-skill workers.

This is a great opportunity for millions of Americans who are out of work, underemployed, or seeking higher wages. However, without adequate skills training, these workers won't be prepared to fill open jobs and carry out high-priority infrastructure projects.

I'm not alone in my concern. On March 6, 2018, during a hearing in this Committee on the President's infrastructure proposal, Transportation Secretary Chao testified, "we probably will not have enough skilled trades workers to be able to address all the infrastructure needs when it finally gets all going... So, the workforce training and retraining part is important."

Many of these jobs do not require a bachelor's degree, but they do involve a significant amount of on-the-job training. CTE and apprenticeships are proven strategies that give individuals the education and work-based learning they need for success in these high-skill, higher-wage careers fields.

Last July, Congress recognized CTE and apprenticeships as effective workforce development strategies when we unanimously reauthorized the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which the President subsequently signed into law. This bipartisan victory demonstrated Congress's renewed commitment to skills-based education in high-demand industries, and I hope the Committee will continue moving this trend forward.

Specifically, I ask that you include in any infrastructure package a requirement that states devote a portion of any funds they receive to workforce development programs, including career and technical education, with the flexibility to invest in programs they deem appropriate through coordination with local workforce boards.

I also request that you include incentives for infrastructure-related businesses that invest in work-based learning, including apprenticeship programs, and dedicated resources for updating the facilities and equipment used in CTE programs that train students for employment in infrastructure jobs.

Each of these components is critical to building a workforce ready to fill millions of high-skill jobs over the next decade, and my fellow co-chair of the Career and Technical Education Caucus, Representative “GT” Thompson, and I will also be sending an official letter to you and the Ranking Member in support of these investments. And I would ask unanimous consent to include a copy of the letter text in the record.

Thank you again, Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, for the opportunity to testify, and for considering these sensible, bipartisan requests.