



STATEMENT

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HOUSE PASSES CAREER EDUCATION ACT

It would be an important step at any time, but all the more so in the contentious climate that reigns today in Washington, a city all but locked down by partisan rancor and disagreement. This week, for a change, Washington worked – and produced a significant victory for high schools and community colleges that prepare students with the skills they need in today’s increasingly technological economy.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, passed in the House today by a vote of 405 to 5, reforms and reauthorizes the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006.

Once one of the most disparaged forms of education in the United States, what used to be called “vocational education” – now reconceived and renamed career and technical education, or CTE – has emerged in the past decade as one of the most promising approaches to preparing students for the future.

“As a group of employers and employer associations in industries that hire workers with technical skills, the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is particularly pleased by what the bill does to encourage employers and educators to work together,” said Opportunity America president Tamar Jacoby. “That’s the only way to develop programs that actually prepare students for the workplace.”

Among provisions of particular interest to employers, the legislation:

- Incentivizes programs that prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, in-demand jobs – not the old, usually irrelevant “Home Ec” or “Wood Shop.”
- Requires robust consultation between educators and employers, giving business a say in setting state performance goals and assessing skills in demand at the local level.
- Incentivizes programs that lead to attainment of “recognized postsecondary credentials,” including industry-recognized certifications.

- Incentivizes programs that incorporate work-based learning, including internship and other on-the-job experience.
- Gives states more flexibility to use federal funding to meet local education needs, including with competitive grant programs to foster innovation.

The next step for the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act: on to the Senate.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition looks forward to working with lawmakers on the Senate side to complete work on this essential legislation modernizing career education in American high schools and community colleges. The bill is too important to fall prey to the partisan discord that could all too easily waylay it in a combative election year.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is a Washington-based business coalition focused on job training and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries experiencing skills mismatches and worker shortages – IT, manufacturing, construction and hospitality, among others.