



US CONGRESS HOLDS HEARING ON JOBS IN PA CAPITOL

By Dennis Owens
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The state Capitol got a taste of the nation's capital on Friday.

A handful of Pennsylvania congressmen, who have pretty good jobs, held a hearing in Harrisburg designed to help others find good jobs.

"There are a lot of jobs available right now, jobs looking for people to fill them," said Congressman Mike Kelly (R-3rd District). "The problem is we haven't educated our children, or re-educated some of those who have lost their employment to the opportunities there today."

"I call that the skills gap," said Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-5th District). "There are jobs available and there's people that need them. Let's fill that skills gap."

Lawmakers repeated at the two-hour hearing that there are an estimated 200,000 jobs in Pennsylvania. But the good ones need skilled labor, not necessarily four-year degree, college-educated labor.

"You have to do something after high school," said Tamar Jacoby, president of Opportunity America, who testified at the hearing. "You have to get some kind of training, but you can make as much as a welder, or a machinist, or a nurse, as you can make with many college degrees, and they're very fulfilling jobs for young people."

Congressman Scott Perry (R-4th District), who hosted the hearing, agrees.

"There are great opportunities, and a place for young people, other than in college," he said. "There are great opportunities to provide for your family and make a great living."

The job for the politicians and panelists is to figure out how to get educators to train workers for the jobs of tomorrow and get companies that need that skilled labor to collaborate. They also need to break down old stereotypes about manual labor being menial.

"Robots are gonna do the work that people don't want to do anymore," Jacoby said. "What we're gonna need is people to man the robots and manage the robots and fix the robots and program the robots. That's gonna be as hard as jobs in offices and just as important."

State Senator John Blake (D-Lackawanna/Monroe/Luzerne) was the token Democrat at the hearing. He says finding the linkage between the skills students get and the skills employers need is vital.

"We're not doing good by our kids if we don't give them a real spark and make a connection between what it is that they're learning and how it is they can use it," Blake said.