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CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: DEVELOPING THE FUTURE OF MAIN STREET SUCCESS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS
UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION: DEVELOPING THE FUTURE OF MAIN STREET SUCCESS

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2026

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:01 a.m., in Room 2360, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Roger Williams [chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Williams, Stauber, Meuser, Van Duyne, Finstad, Wied, Bresnahan, Jack, Downing, Schmidt, McIver, Cisneros, Morrison, Tran, Olszewski, and Goodlander.

Chairman WILLIAMS. I want to welcome everybody to the hearing today.

The first thing I want to say is that I want to congratulate Congressman Stauber from the great State of Minnesota, a former Olympic hockey player. And the hockey USA team, we know, won the gold medal.

I want to say congratulations to you and your sport.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

[Applause.]

Chairman WILLIAMS. And before we get started, I would like to recognize Congressman Schmidt from the great State of Kansas to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance and the prayer.

Please stand.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Will you join me in prayer?

Heavenly Father, thank you for this opportunity to come together today, for bringing us all safely here. And please keep watching over those who are traveling in and traveling around our country in this time of difficult weather.

Give us the courage, the wisdom, and the fortitude to come together and lead this great country as you would see fit.

In the name of your son, Jesus Christ, amen.

Please join me for the pledge.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Chairman WILLIAMS. I want to say good morning to everyone. I want to call the Committee on Small Business to order.

And, without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Committee at any time.

I want to now recognize myself for an opening statement.

And I want to say welcome to today's hearing, "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success."

First, I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today during the National Career and Technical Education Month.

Thank you all for being here.

And career and technical education programs, also known as CTE programs, play a vital role in society that is all too often overlooked.

Today, the Committee will focus on several issues holding Main Street America back. There is no denying that small businesses across the nation are facing a shortage of skilled American workers. Millions of trade jobs remain unfilled, and this crisis is compounded as baby boomers retire in record numbers.

The shortage is even worse in rural communities, like those I represent in Texas, where employers face additional barriers to finding qualified workers. And I hear from people back home every day that we need more plumbers, we need more welders, we need carpenters, we need nurses, we need mechanics.

Yet where there is a crisis, there is also an opportunity. CTE programs have proven to provide students with effective pathways to high-wage, high-demand careers.

President Trump and his administration have made workforce development a priority to address the growing demand for skilled workers in skilled trades.

The Working Families Tax Cut Act created Workforce Pell Grants to cover the costs of short-term credential programs, not just traditional college degrees.

In addition to the SBA's workforce development resources, the Department of Labor announced a $145 million investment opportunity on January 6, 2026, to support the national apprenticeship program and system.

Earlier this Congress, the House passed my bill, H.R. 1642, the Connecting Small Businesses with Career and Technical Education Graduates Act. And this bill requires Small Business Development Centers and Women's Business Centers to provide educational resources to small businesses on hiring CTE program graduates.

Now, I would like to once again thank my colleagues for their bipartisan support of this measure, and I look forward to hearing more today about additional actions this Committee can take to strengthen the pipeline to high-demand jobs and help address our nation's workforce shortage crisis.

I want to thank our panel, again, of witnesses for taking the time from your home to participate in this important hearing, and we look forward to your testimony today.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Representative Tran from the great State of California, for his opening remarks.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing on one of the most pressing issues facing small businesses—a shortage of workers with needed skill sets.

The American workforce is facing a series of compounding crises. An aging population means millions of baby boomers are soon retiring. Aggressive immigration enforcement is removing capable and law-abiding workers from the labor pool. And artificial intelligence

is rapidly reshaping which skills are valuable. Investing thoughtfully in workplace development is more urgent than ever.

These workforce shortages are hitting hardest in the sectors where affordability has become a defining challenge for young Americans. In healthcare, we will be short over 267,000 registered nurses by 2028. In housing, we already lack as many as half a million builders, contractors, and construction managers. And as we attempt to reshore critical manufacturing, we lack the electricians, welders, and the advanced manufacturing workforce to make it a reality.

The trend is clear: Traditional education pathways are failing workers and employers. Revamping career and technical education, or CTE, is a promising solution that builds on a system that has existed for decades. It is already widely present in high schools, and students who concentrate in it see successful outcomes.

Despite this success, it has long been underfunded. Adjusted for inflation, it has been cut by more than 50 percent since 1980. Over the past two decades, high school enrollment has flattened, while post-secondary enrollment has dropped by 25 percent. Bolstering these budgets is a worthwhile investment.

Conversely, registered apprenticeships have become one of the fastest-growing CTE strategies, with the number of apprentices doubling over the past decade. By combining classroom education with paid on-the-job training, they provide a direct pipeline into a job. Ninety-four percent of apprentices retain employment after completion, with an average starting salary of $80,000.

They don't just benefit workers; they benefit businesses as well. By strengthening retention and growing the labor pool, they provide a proven return on investment.

Despite the benefits, small businesses face significant barriers to participation. The registration process is time-consuming and complex, making it difficult for resource-constrained small employers. Promising solutions like apprenticeship intermediaries and consortiums give us an opportunity to reduce that burden. These models remove much of the administrative work for small businesses and allow them to partner together to address shortages.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how strengthening CTE and apprenticeships can relieve our workforce shortages, bolster small-business growth, and make life more affordable for the American people.

Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

I will now turn to witness introductions and recognize Mr. Bresnahan from the great State of Pennsylvania to introduce his constituent testifying here today.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I am proud to introduce our first witness today, northeastern Pennsylvania's very own Dr. Keith Gunuskey.

Dr. Gunuskey currently serves as superintendent of the Wallenpaupack Area School District. He brings more than 24 years of experience in education, having served students in a range of roles, including special education teacher, assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent.

Dr. Gunuskey has been a strong advocate for expanding student access to career and technical education, helping ensure his students can pursue good-paying technical careers after graduation in fields like aviation, construction, culinary arts, and more. And they have a real-life 737 simulator.

In Pennsylvania, career and technical centers allow school districts within a region to share high-quality facilities and equipment, partner with local employers, and provide students with hands-on training that aligns with local workforce needs. Yet Wayne and Pike Counties in my district remain the only two counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania without access to a CTC.

That is finally being fixed, as the Wallenpaupack School District, alongside neighboring school districts, is stepping up to fill this gap. I am proud to work with Dr. Gunuskey to make sure this project becomes a reality for the students and families in Wayne and Pike.

Beyond his professional duties, he is actively involved in his community, serving on the Wayne County YMCA Board and the Wayne Memorial Hospital Advisory Committee and volunteering for more than 30 years as a firefighter.

Dr. Gunuskey earned his Doctorate of Education in leadership studies, with a concentration of disaster preparedness and emergency management from Louisiana State University Shreveport.

And thank you for joining us today, taking time out of the busy day up in northeastern Pennsylvania. And I am looking forward to our meaningful conversation.

I yield.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

And I would like to now recognize Congressman Schmidt from the great State of Kansas to introduce his constituent testifying here today.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for convening this hearing today, and we appreciate your having a Kansan on the panel.

It is my pleasure to introduce Mike Gibson. Mr. Gibson is the executive vice president of the Associated General Contractors of Kansas.

The AGC of Kansas often bills itself as the Chamber of Commerce for the construction industry in Kansas, representing over 300 Kansas general contractors, subcontractors, and professional service firms and their 20,000 employees. It is headquartered in Wichita, but we forgive that because they have their legislative affairs shop in Topeka.

Before this role, Mike was involved in similar workforce development roles with the industry in New Mexico, Louisiana, and Houston, Texas. He has served on the Board of Directors for the National Center for Construction Education and Research and currently serves on that organization's Workforce Development Committee.

He is here today to talk with us about the Build Up Kansas program. Each of our colleagues has a pamphlet on their desk. And I would just characterize it this way: This is an industry- and employer-driven effort to connect all of the parts that are producing

plumbers and construction workers and electricians, so that the pipeline is feeding the actual jobs that are needed and fit in the local dynamics in every community around the State. It is a terrific initiative.

I would just finally say, Mr. Chairman, Mike attended Texas Tech, which we forgive him for. But he is married to his wife, Rachal, for which we are grateful he brought her today.

Rachal, wave for everybody.

And, Mr. Chairman, thanks for having this hearing.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back. And you are right on Texas Tech.

Mr. GIBSON. Don't hold that against me.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Our next witness today is Dr. Nikki Nix, one of my constituents, from the great State of Texas and the great city of Godley, Texas.

Dr. Nix serves as chief academic officer for the Godley Independent School District in Godley, Texas. And Dr. Nix has worked for nearly 20 years in public education, serving as a teacher, dual enrollment instructor, academic advisor, director of career and technical education, and as chief readiness officer.

She has served on district committees and advisory boards, including the Godley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

Dr. Nix holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Midwestern State University, a Master of Education from Lamar University, and a Doctorate in Education from Arkansas State University.

She is a respected leader in our district, and we appreciate her being here today.

I now recognize the Ranking Member from the great State of California, Mr. Tran, to briefly introduce our last witness appearing before us today.

Mr. TRAN. I got the pleasure of introducing Mr. Zach Boren, who is a senior vice president of Apprenticeships for America, where he leads national efforts to expand and modernize registered apprenticeships across the United States.

With nearly two decades of experience in apprenticeship and workforce policy, he previously directed federally and privately funded apprenticeship initiatives at the Urban Institute and served as Director of Registered Apprenticeship and Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor.

His work has been featured in multiple publications, including U.S. News & World Report, NBC News, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Washington Monthly, and Real Clear Politics.

Thank you, Mr. Boren, and I look forward to your testimony. And welcome to your family as well.

I yield back.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

And I want to say thank you again to all of the witnesses. We appreciate you being here today.

Now, before recognizing the witnesses, I would like to remind them—we have got some rules around here, okay? I would like to remind them that their oral testimony is restricted to 5 minutes in length.

If you see the light turn red in front of you, it means your 5 minutes have concluded and you should wrap up your testimony. And if you hear this—[gavel banging]—that means you are going too long, you are ignoring the federal government and all that stuff that goes with it. So we won't have much of that. But we do watch that very closely, so you will see the lights there.

Now, before recognizing the witnesses, I want to remind them that your oral testimony is restricted to 5 minutes in length, and if you see the light turn red, you will know what the time is.

So I want to now recognize Dr. Gunuskey for his 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENTS OF KEITH GUNUSKEY, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, WALLENPAUPACK AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT; MIKE GIBSON, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS (AGC) OF KANSAS; NIKKI NIX, CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER, GODLEY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT; AND ZACH BOREN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, APPRENTICESHIPS FOR AMERICA

STATEMENT OF KEITH GUNUSKEY

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Chairman and Members of the United States House Small Business Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is truly an honor to speak with you about the critical role career and technical education plays in strengthening Main Street America and building America's workforce.

I can say that this topic is so important to me that I literally drove through a blizzard to be here today. It was more of a blizzard warning.

My name is Keith Gunuskey, and I proudly serve as superintendent of the Wallenpaupack Area School District in northeastern Pennsylvania. Our district serves 3,000 students from Wayne and Pike Counties and is very rural, covering 325 square miles. I am proud to say that our communities are rich in work ethic, resilience, and commitment to opportunity.

Wayne and Pike Counties are unique in Pennsylvania. We are the only 2 counties out of the 67 counties in the State that do not currently have a dedicated career and tech center.

Yet, despite this, we have never approached career and technical education with a deficit mindset. Instead, we have embraced a "do the best you can with what you have" mindset. Using limited space and shared facilities, we have built strong, high-quality programs in automotive technology; outdoor power equipment; building construction; childcare; allied health, which is our nursing program; engineering; culinary arts; protective services, which covers law enforcement, EMS, and firefighting; rehabilitation aid; and aviation.

These AI-resistant programs reflect the real workforce needs of our region and provide students with meaningful pathways to employment, entrepreneurship, and life-sustaining wages, all while staying in the beautiful northern Pocono Mountains.

I am privileged to be a part of a school district with a rich history of identifying community and workforce needs and aligning those needs to curricular pathways and creating opportunities for

our students so that schools-to-work relationships can be strengthened.

My predecessors did not wait for the perfect conditions to make CTE programs a critical part of our school. Instead, robust programs were created, and I am happy to report that, today, over 40 percent of our high school students participate in CTE programs.

We have accomplished this by flipping the script on career and tech education. Our programs are no longer viewed as vocational-ed programs for the non-academic or the non-college-bound student. Our programs are driven by certifications and post-secondary accreditation, which allows students to bank college credits in high school, thus allowing them to graduate from college quicker, with less debt, and allow the students to begin honing their skills and expertise earlier in their educational experience.

At the same time, the demand for career and tech education in rural Pennsylvania is overwhelming. Our neighboring career and tech centers are operating at full capacity, with hundreds of students on waiting lists. For example, the Monroe County Technical Institute currently has more than 600 students waiting for admission, and they are not alone. These are motivated students who want to learn, work, and contribute to their communities but who are being turned away simply because there is not enough space.

We feel the same restriction in our own CT programs, as many of our class sizes are limited due to the lack of student space in our school. Where we might have 25 students in a CTE program in a CTC, that is held—we are limited to about a dozen students in our current high school. That reality underscores the need for a CTC in Wayne and Pike Counties.

Today, we are in the process of building what will be the final CTC in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This facility will represent the completion of a statewide network of CTE infrastructure and will ensure that no region is left behind.

A major reason this project is possible is the federal government's investment, secured through the leadership of Representative Bresnahan. Through his advocacy, Wayne Pike CTC was awarded $3 million in federal funding. This investment is allowing us to expand capacity, modernize equipment, and create learning environments that mirror today's workplaces.

This funding is not about bricks and mortar; it is about access. It is about workforce readiness. It is about giving rural students the same opportunities as their peers in more populated, affluent areas.

In our region, 60 percent of our students are considered economically disadvantaged. Career and tech education is not an "alternative" path; for many families, it is the primary pathway to economic stability. It connects students directly to local contractors, healthcare providers, manufacturers, service businesses, and entrepreneurs. It prepares them not only to work on Main Street USA but to become Main Street USA.

Our students graduate ready to participate in post-secondary education if they choose, ready to contribute to our country in the Armed Forces if they choose, and ready to contribute to our workforce if they choose. Our employers gain skilled workers. Our communities grow stronger.

Today, I look forward to sharing how strategic investments in career and tech education can strengthen small businesses, expand rural economies, and build a workforce prepared for long-term success.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here, and I welcome your questions and our discussion.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you.

The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Gibson for his 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF MIKE GIBSON

Mr. GIBSON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank Congressman Derek Schmidt for his leadership and vision of Kansas and his invite today.

I also would like to thank your staffer Colin Hall for his assistance in having us today.

The purpose of my testimony today is to share with you some best practices and successes that AGC of Kansas has developed in Kansas.

Our program, our workforce development program for CTE is called Build Up Kansas. And you have a brochure in front of you that is already outdated, but it gives you a little flavor of what it is all about.

But this is the most successful public-private partnership in the State of Kansas and maybe Midwest in terms of focus, bringing together policymakers, educators, and the construction industry to laser-focus on CTE technical training for our younger generation.

A historical perspective: Over the last 40 years, schools have been told to send everybody to college. We all know that. But, with that, they have spent the lion's share of their resources on preparing kids for college.

In Kansas, we, with our focus groups—and I believe this reflects the country—nearly 70 percent of our students either can't afford to go to college or don't want to go to college. So what are they doing?

We approached the Kansas Board of Regents, which oversees the college and community college and vo-tech colleges, and the Kansas Department of Education with our training curriculum partner, the National Center for Construction Education and Research, NCCER, to get that curriculum approved.

It is the only construction trade materials approved by both agencies. The reason for that is, it has a credential component that the students have that they can demonstrate their proficiencies.

But it now has become the number-one pathway, cited by the Kansas Department of Education. Construction technology leads the way of every profession pathway in the State. And we are real proud about that.

What brought us to this point, in terms of CTE programming being a top priority for Kansas?

Four years ago, Panasonic was looking to move out of California, and they looked at Oklahoma and looked at Kansas. The key question that they asked—and I would suggest to you, why your Committee is so important to this country is—the question they asked our Governor, our Lieutenant Governor, and our legislature was: If

we are going to invest $5 billion in your State, we need 13,000 construction workers to build that facility. But the question was, can you build and can you maintain our facility?

I will suggest to each one of you as policymakers, that is the key to success for every State that you represent, now and well into the future: Can you build and maintain our facility?

And we stepped up with Build Up Kansas. We now, with funding from the State, which pays for the textbooks, the online testing for credentials, and the train-the-trainer for the instructors—in less than 3 years, we have had 150 high schools and community colleges come on line with CTE programs, 10,000 students in carpentry, welding, electrical, HVAC, sheet metal, plumbing, and the core curriculum.

The great news is, 21 percent of those 10,000 students are female. The female population is being migrated or drawn in to construction because of the great careers and great pay.

We also, with the NCCER curriculum—it is approved by the Department of Labor, Department of Education, Department of Justice, our Kansas Board of Regents, and Kansas Department of Education.

We are not just stopping with the high schools and community colleges. We have four correctional facilities that are using our curriculum. The largest is right outside of Wichita. The El Dorado Correctional Facility has 150 low-risk inmates taking masonry training. Those low-risk inmates, as soon as they are being released, are being hired by industry. They are telling me they are better employees than the ones they have.

The other component that the Department of Commerce likes with what we are doing—we have an HR platform that we provide at no cost to the construction industry to post their jobs by craft and by city. And we geofence the high schools that are partners with us. The kids can download their resume and send it directly to the HR director who posted that job opening for an interview. That is something that no one else has.

The publisher for NCCER curriculum is Pearson. Pearson has gone all over the country; they have not seen a partnership like what Build Up Kansas has brought to the table.

My recommendations to you, in closing: increase funding. The Perkins Act is critical.

I also would suggest that the administration, whether it be this one or in the future, establish a CTE czar. That way, business and industry and education knows who to go to in the Department of Labor that specializes in CTE.

I would also take a page from my former life running the AGC Highway: Look at a funding formula, that if a State spends $1 on CTE, the Feds match those dollars.

And the last one: Don't forget about construction trade associations. They have the finger on the pulse of policymakers, education, and business and industry. They know what their workforce needs are. And if you put provisions in your congressional——

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman's time is up.

Mr. GIBSON. Yep. I am sorry, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the time.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you, again, for that great report.

I now recognize Dr. Nix for her 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF NIKKI NIX

Ms. NIX. Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Tran, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the critical connection between career and technical education, CTE, and our nation's workforce in developing the future of main street success.

My name is Dr. Nikki Nix, chief academic officer for Godley ISD in Texas. With more than 20 years in education as a CTE teacher, coordinator, and director, I have seen firsthand how education and small business must work together to prepare students for meaningful careers.

Godley is a fast-growing, rural community southwest of Fort Worth, Texas. Our district serves around 3,300 students and covers 122 square miles. Our residential growth has surged, but our large-scale industry has not grown. Strong public schools and thriving small businesses are truly the heartbeat of our community.

In 2024, we opened The WILD, The Wildcat Innovative Learning Destination, a 77,000-square-foot CTE center intentionally designed within a traditional football-stadium footprint to maximize taxpayer dollars.

What looks like a football stadium from the highway is actually more than 40 classrooms, collaboration spaces, and learning environments serving 13 CTE programs of study, ranging from agriculture and health science to audio-video and entrepreneurship. In these programs, students earn industry-based certifications aligned with real workforce needs.

Because local internship opportunities are limited for us, we intentionally designed student-run enterprises inside The WILD to replicate real-world experiences.

Shop The WILD, our school store, is a fully student-run enterprise, where entrepreneurship students manage every aspect of the business while selling apparel and spirit items. Shop The WILD also serves as the point of sale for programs within the facility like our drone students, who are often hired to film aerial footage of properties for our local real estate agents, and welding students building custom projects for community members.

Wild Blooms is our floral design shop. It is open to the public during high-demand events like homecoming and Valentine's Day, turning the classroom into a working retail business.

iLEAD, our information technology program, supports and services all of our student technology devices across the district. Through this student-led enterprise, we are able to bring device repairs in-house, eliminating costly outsourcing fees while providing students with authentic, hands-on experience.

Since opening The WILD, CTE enrollment has grown significantly. Our students are drawn to the authentic labs, real-world equipment, and coursework that lead to tangible credentials and career opportunities.

Texas provides weighted funding for CTE courses, which is critical. However, in fast-growth communities like ours, increases in the State homestead exemption limit local revenue growth. This directly affects our ability to expand facilities and meet the demand students have for high-quality workforce programs.

The Small Business Committee can play a pivotal role in strengthening CTE. Some key actions from you might include things like: creating tax incentives or direct funding for small businesses that hire high school interns or apprentices, helping to offset training and supervision costs; providing incentives for local and regional workforce development organizations to formally partner with public schools in building workforce-ready talent pipelines; supplementing local salary schedules to create competitive CTE teacher pay, enabling schools to recruit professionals with real-world experience; prohibiting unfunded state and federal mandates and ensuring that K-12 funding grows at at least the rate of inflation; and restricting State actions that reduce or undermine local funding mechanisms, particularly those that limit bonding capacity for fast-growth districts like Godley, such as excessive increases to homestead exemptions that erode districts' ability to finance facilities and CTE infrastructure.

Career and technical education is no longer an alternative pathway; it is an essential strategy for economic growth and small-business sustainability. When students graduate with certifications and real-world experience, they strengthen small business, they fill workforce gaps, and they often become entrepreneurs themselves.

At Godley ISD, we believe education should launch students into opportunity, supporting small businesses and the future of main street.

Thank you for your time today, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Boren for his 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF ZACH BOREN

Mr. BOREN. Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Tran, and distinguished Members of this Committee, thank you for convening this hearing on how we can strengthen America's main streets by investing in career and technical education, including apprenticeships.

I am Zach Boren. I am senior vice president of Apprenticeships for America. We are a national industry association advancing apprenticeships as America's first choice talent strategy. Our North Star is to reach at least 4 million active apprentices over the next decade, putting us on par with Germany, Switzerland, England, competitors that invest heavily in the trades and apprenticeships.

I am grateful to be here at a hearing about career and technical education because that is what apprenticeships are. Apprenticeships are the oldest form of work-based learning. And CTE is where that journey begins, building real, hands-on skills. And apprenticeships are where those skills turn into paid jobs, credentials, and careers. Together, they form this seamless pathway from school to work.

I am also the proud son of an apprenticeship graduate myself. My dad completed a meter technician apprenticeship in Indiana. His apprenticeship didn't just land him a job; it built a trade that sustained our family and built our American Dream for more than 50 years and still does today.

My career includes a decade of civil service at the U.S. Department of Labor, working across multiple administrations to expand registered apprenticeships. During that time, we reached a 20-year high in apprentices and participating employers, we cut red tape by 70 percent, and we expanded the GI Bill for veterans who needed access to those education dollars.

I have worked with Fortune 500s like Google and GM to build apprenticeship programs, but, just as importantly, I have worked with small employers with similar talent needs. One example is Technically IT. It is a small, minority-owned business in South Carolina. Its founder, Ashley, turned to apprenticeships to grow in a tight labor market. With support for training and start-up costs, she launched quickly and saved nearly $100,000 in education expenses, and her company grew.

Her story matters because small businesses employ nearly half of America's private-sector workforce, yet they consistently say that the biggest challenge is finding skilled workers. Registered apprenticeships allow employers to train workers to industry specifications with local flexibility while workers earn a paycheck from day one.

The average apprentice, as Congressman Tran pointed out, earns about $80,000 when they complete that apprenticeship program, and their earnings increase 50 percent. Employers see a good return too: a 144-percent return on investment while significantly lowering worker turnover.

Yet, today, just three-tenths of 1 percent of American workers are apprentices.

With nearly 680,000 Americans learning through apprenticeships each year, that is more learners than the nine largest public universities combined, but apprenticeships receive only a fraction of the federal investment for education. For every dollar we invest in apprenticeships, $1,000 is spent on higher education.

Small businesses face their own set of barriers to adopting apprenticeships. Those include upfront costs, administrative complexity, and slow State approval processes that can hamper their success.

I have experienced this kind of apprenticeship bureaucracy myself. In Pennsylvania, a small business I supported waited more than 10 months and three council hearings for approval, even though they had a solid training plan that met the State's requirements and they were ready to hire. Delays like that mean lost contracts and lost workers.

If Congress wants to unlock apprenticeship growth, then we must make it easier to start and financially workable for small employers. The most effective model is a group employer sponsor approach. That is where multiple small businesses share infrastructure and coordinate training and compliance.

North Carolina really shows the way, where more than 25 groups help employers collaborate with community colleges to scale their own apprenticeship programs in a variety of industries.

When small businesses work together, they don't have to build everything on their own. They train together, and they grow.

This Committee can incentivize groups of employers to start apprenticeships through a pay-for-performance model that rewards

hiring and completion, not paperwork and process that protects taxpayers and lowers risk for employers.

This Committee gets it: What drives main street is risk, cash flow, and workforce. Building and incentivizing apprenticeship addresses all three. It is the most effective talent and anti-poverty strategy we have, where Americans can advance through their sweat, not student debt, strengthening families and hometowns.

We do not need a new idea for small-business talent; we need an old one. Registered apprenticeship works. Let's scale what works.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

Let me also bring up something. If you see Members walking in, walking out, it is nothing you said; nobody is mad. There are a lot of other hearings going on, and so they will come and go. So I just want to make sure we understand that.

And now we will move to the Member questions under the 5-minute rule we talked about, and I will recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Dr. Nix, based on your experience teaching CTE programs, these programs provide a pivotal solution to the skilled workforce shortage and offer students a robust pathway to acquire hands-on experience, industry-recognized certifications, and valuable partnerships with local businesses.

My question is, what more can be done to increase awareness of skilled trades so students can utilize them as pathways to high-paying, in-demand careers?

Ms. NIX. I think it starts with really recognizing the fact that you can graduate and enter the workforce with a skilled trade that costs you pretty much nothing if you are coming from public school. There is not a college tuition that you have to pay to get that. A lot of times, high schools can provide that full certification in your high school experience, and you can graduate with little to no debt.

I think incentivizing that and helping parents understand that is a huge part of promoting and recruiting students into skilled trades, for sure.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Perfect.

So, additionally, how would an increase in CTE students and graduates benefit rural communities like Godley, like the one that you serve in my district, and those others around it?

Ms. NIX. The more students we can get certified and ready to enter the workforce, the faster our community is going to grow.

As I mentioned earlier, we are a rural community, and our growth has largely come from rooftops and not an industry or even a lot of small businesses.

If we can graduate students who understand the culture of Godley and in keeping our small-town feel that our community loves, those students want to come back and live and work in our community and start new businesses there to provide construction trades and welding and masonry jobs right here locally to our own community, and that helps our own town in a tremendous way.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Mr. Gibson, by 2030, data suggests that if the workforce shortage is not addressed, it will cost the U.S. economy $1.75 trillion in lost revenue.

So can you explain how your member businesses have strengthened their partnerships with CTE programs?

Mr. GIBSON. Well, thank you, Mr. Chair.

One thing I will build on with my company—we did a presentation last fall amongst western Kansas economic developers. And after the presentation, a mayor of a little town of 500 came up to me and said, "Mike, y'all keep focusing on technical trades." He said, "We had a water main break in our city 6 months ago. It took 3 weeks to find a backhoe operator, and we had to have our residents use bottled water." That is one example. How did that impact quality of life and economic development?

But I would suggest to you, going back to the original question that Panasonic asked: building and maintain a facility. We are, right now—you are—working to try to attract all those companies that left this country over the years to come back here. And I know they are asking the same question: Are we capable of building and maintaining our facilities?

And the key to that is technical trades. I will promise you, the return on the investment is multifold—in terms of what the employer needs, the employee has a professional career.

In our State, we need 58,000 new construction workers. I told the Speaker of the House—I made this comment 2 years ago. I said, "You have a partner with AGC of Kansas that cannot fail." He said, "You are making a bold statement in front of my colleagues." I said, "No, sir." I said, "If we don't get 58,000 new construction workers over the next 3 to 5 years, I may have a lot of construction firms going out of business, because the first thing a contractor needs is people in order to bid a project."

So this has a ripple effect throughout the economy.

And with the infrastructure, the—we all know that our highways and bridges and overall infrastructure is aging. It is going to require a big amount of professional career folks coming out of high school and community college and vo-tech, more so than ever before.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you.

Dr. Gunuskey, the Wayne Pike Career and Technical Center is a joint effort among multiple school districts in Pennsylvania to house 13 career and technical education programs.

My question is, can you discuss the importance of a dedicated CTE center for engaging students in CTE programs at a very young age?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Absolutely.

I think, you know, one of the things—going back to a previous question of what else we can do, I think it is important to begin early exploration of the trades in career and tech education, starting at kindergarten on up. It not only really allows the students to home in on an interest that they may particularly have, it also focuses on non-traditional students, students that may not have seen their pathway going through the world of career and tech education.

And so I do believe having that CTC—having a CTC is critical, because it puts the message out that this is important.

It also creates half-day programs. Right now, our students, if they want to attend a career and tech ed program in our school

from a neighboring school district, they must actually withdraw from their current school and enroll in our school, leaving their friends and families behind. So we are forcing kids to choose between their families and friends——

Chairman WILLIAMS. My time is up.

Mr. GUNUSKEY.—and their career.

Chairman WILLIAMS. My time is up.

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yep.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you for that.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Boren, I am proud to co-lead H.R. 1642, the Connecting Small Businesses with Career and Technical Education Graduates Act, with my colleagues Chairman Williams, Congressman Olszewski, and Congressman Bresnahan. Our bill aims to help small-business owners fill gaps in their workforce by connecting them with graduates of vocational programs through SBA's Small Business Development Center program.

I think one of the largest missed opportunities in our economy is between connecting CTE graduates and the small businesses that desperately need their skills. Right now, small businesses are often the last to know that a pipeline of trained, job-ready workers exists in their own backyard.

From your work with apprenticeships nationwide, how important is it to formally connect small businesses with CTE graduates? And what best practices have you seen that ensure these partnerships translate into jobs?

Mr. BOREN. That is a great question.

And, you know, it really begins with CTE. CTE builds those foundational skills at the high school and community college level. But we have not yet built this pathway from career and technical education into registered apprenticeships, which are those paid on-the-job learning opportunities. We have this real disconnect between what happens at the Department of Education under CTE and registered apprenticeship, which has a large—fairly large footprint of 680,000 apprentices nationwide.

We can also look at pre-apprenticeship as a real bridge in between CTE and apprenticeships. And, you know, a really great example of that is what is happening in Iowa.

So I worked with Central Campus in Des Moines, Iowa, led by a terrific director. They partnered with John Deere and a bunch of their suppliers to build apprenticeship programs at the high school that leverages the CTE training that is happening in the high school with what is happening at the factory.

So this is really the idea of, like, how do we connect, you know, CTE leaders at the high school level with businesses that actually have those jobs in demand.

Mr. TRAN. You know, on that, in your written testimony, you wrote about a secret sauce that helps small businesses' apprenticeship programs succeed. Can you further discuss those factors?

Mr. BOREN. Yeah. I think the secret sauce is really coming out of North Carolina, and it is not just their barbecue. It is really how they have built 25 different consortia across the State—you know, these consortium that bring employers together to design appren-

ticeship programs, to organize them with other employers who have like needs, and then also to bring them to scale.

So a great example of that is Apprenticeship 2000. It is a 30-year youth apprenticeship program just outside of Charlotte. It began with about eight or nine companies, both German, Swiss, Austrian, and American. And, you know, a really amazing aspect of that is that they had this need in 1994 for something called mechatronics. And mechatronics is probably pretty familiar to everyone today, but it is really this combination of mechanics and engineering at the factory-floor level. But the community college had no idea how to teach it.

So they came together as a consortium to build the apprenticeship program together as, you know, kind of, not necessarily competitors but people working in the same industry. And they have been able to sustain that program for over 30 years.

One of the young men I met there was at Ameritech Die & Mold, named Sean. He was 21 years old, just finished his apprenticeship program. He was buying his second house, getting married. We asked him what his friends were doing. Most of them were on their couch, you know, vaping and playing video games. Meanwhile, he is living the American Dream.

Mr. TRAN. A question for the entire panel if I can get a chance: How do we change the narrative nationally so that career and technical education is seen as an equal value to traditional college pathways?

Why don't I start with you, Dr. Gunuskey?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yes. Just to re-echo what I said before, I think it is the early education. It is going to our—you know, going to the elementary schools and the middle schools and giving them the opportunities to see what their pathway can include.

I also think it is important to ensure that all of the equipment that we have is reflective of the equipment that is in industry so that we are not working on two different levels, teaching kids one pathway and then they enter the field in an industry and they are working on different equipment. So I think mirroring that equipment is critical.

Mr. TRAN. Thank you. I am out of time, but—Chairman, I yield back—look forward to talking with you all a little more.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

And I now recognize Mr. Stauber from the great State of Minnesota, the hockey magnate in this group, and champion, for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Well, first off, Mr. Chair, I appreciate you holding this meeting.

And I want to be real crystal-clear: I actually tried out for the 1992 Olympic team, and I wasn't good enough. So that was the way it is.

But my younger brother coached the women's team to the 2018 Olympic gold medal in Pyeongchang. And I can tell you that these, the women's Olympic gold medal and the men's gold medal—something special for our country. And I think we have to congratulate the athletes.

And I don't know about you, but you get chills and a tear in your eye when they have that flag wrapped around them, you know,

skating around the rink. Both the men's and the women's team, we are so proud of them and all the athletes that made the United States proud.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Gibson, at the end of last year, there were roughly 6.5 million job openings nationwide. In northern Minnesota and across the Eighth District, contractors tell me they have work lined up but it can be difficult to find enough skilled workers to get it done.

From your vantage point, how is the skilled labor shortage impacting the construction companies you represent, especially small and midsize firms?

Mr. GIBSON. Thank you.

Build Up Kansas took this on several years ago, because, again, we need 58,000 new construction workers to keep up with market demand. But the bottom line is, the small to medium-size firms are now having to be very selective on what they bid, which keeps them from being able to grow their company, grow their expertise, and other related growth opportunities——

Mr. STAUBER. And that is what we want to do in small business, Mr. Gibson——

Mr. GIBSON. Absolutely.

Mr. STAUBER.—have the small-business man or woman be part of that.

Mr. GIBSON. Absolutely.

The other thing and the thing I saw when I moved to Kansas 15 years ago was, Kansas has ranked over the last 40 years 40 to 45th in the country for out-migration of population. We are actually slowing that down, to where employers are starting to see, because of CTE programs, those young women and men taking technical trade programs, and they are getting their credentials, to where they can get jobs close to home where they grew up versus moving somewhere else and their parents following where they go. And when their parents retire, guess what? They follow and sell their homes and take their wealth with them to wherever their kids and grandkids are.

So our employers are really excited about what CTE has brought to the table, because it has actually increased the number of a working pool of technical trade folks with credentials that they can immediately put to work on the job site.

Mr. STAUBER. Right.

You know, one of the things when I talk to high schools, I say the—at the graduation, you know, instead of when we recognize the highest GPA in the class, why don't we recognize the best mechanic? Why don't we recognize the best carpenter? Why don't we recognize the sheet-metal worker that made something to put on display? We have to—we have to really push for that.

And I want to thank you all, you know, for doing—go ahead, Mr. Gibson.

Mr. GIBSON. We actually—with our community college and votech, we actually have a graduation ceremony where, just as a graduation for our college students, we are doing the same thing.

But the bottom line being is, you have to look at how you provide those resources for that younger generation. They look for structure.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes.

Mr. GIBSON. And technical trade programs, apprenticeship programs—in fact, my good friend Mr. Boren talked about the different programs out there. Kansas is now one of the leading apprenticeship programs, pre-apprenticeship programs. And the reason for that is, it brings structure to the younger generation, who is seeking that structure.

Mr. STAUBER. I have 1 minute left. And this is for anybody here——

Chairman WILLIAMS. You can have another minute if you want.

Mr. STAUBER. I can have another—oh, thank you, Mr. Chair.

What would you say the impact will be from the new policy in the One Big Beautiful Bill where Congress created the Workforce Pell Grant, which will allow Pell funds to be used for components of registered apprenticeship programs starting this July?

Mr. BOREN. I am happy to take that one.

Mr. STAUBER. Go ahead, Mr. Boren.

Mr. BOREN. Yeah. We are excited about Workforce Pell. I think, you know, Pell has long incentivized, you know, college students to do well in college to be able to save some of those dollars that—that gets really expensive. You know, the average student loan debt is $38,000 across the United States—a whopping $1.7 trillion in student loans.

And today we are really looking at Workforce Pell being able to bring new talent into the trades and to a number of occupations that don't necessarily require a 4-year degree and offset both the costs of the student as well as the small employer that wants to hire that talent.

We are going to see how this rolls out. We are really excited about what the Department of Education has done here. But it is going to take a lot of innovation at the State level to get it off the ground.

Mr. STAUBER. And I think that—you bring it up—at the State level, I want the States to compete. I want the States to compete, you know, for the workforce. And I hope that all 50 States agree with that. Because at the State level, I think this would be great—things coming out of, you know, the discussions at the State level.

Does anybody else want to talk about the Workforce Pell Grants? Because Pell Grants have never been used for registered apprenticeships. Anybody?

Mr. Gibson, go ahead.

Mr. GIBSON. I think you are going to see that the States that are focused on CTE are going to step up and take advantage of these opportunities like no tomorrow. Because, again, what we are seeing is, our policymakers, our education deliverables—we use community college and vo-tech to deliver a lot of our training programs.

And then the other thing that we told Congressman Schmidt—what a great story legislators have to tell to their constituents on how articulation agreements are being used by high schools and community colleges to use resources, like resources, and not having to duplicate it. But these Pell Grants will only reinforce that momentum that is being shown on CTE.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much.

Thank you for indulging me for an extra minute, Mr. Chair, and I yield back.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Cisneros from the great State of California for 5 minutes.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to all our witnesses for being here today on this important topic.

I am going to start this first question with our two educators here on the panel, Dr. Gunuskey and Dr. Nix.

You know, back when I was in high school, which was not that many—a few years ago, you know, we had electives where you could take, whether it be wood shop, metal shop, auto mechanics, home economics. And a lot of that went away.

And I know, now, we have created these pathways that students can get on. But the thing I kind of worry about, right, it is—you know, these used to be electives, things that could kind of go—you could go from this or that and kind of see what you liked, rather than having to choose a pathway and then that becomes your direction that now you are—for a lot of students, if they do it for a little while and then decide they don't like it, they are still kind of stuck on that pathway on their way to graduation.

How do we get back to a system where we can expose students to different things, let them choose these electives, so they don't have to kind of make this decision and they can kind of work—"You know what? I think I like this." You know, "Maybe I didn't like that, but let me try this." How do we get back to that?

Ms. NIX. Well, if you use myself as an example, I changed my major five times in college and got a degree and then still went back and got an alternative certification to become an educator. So, most times, even after you enter the workforce, you change your job multiple times before you actually find where you land.

I think that is an important distinction to make for our students as well. And it is something that people have touched on in different arenas already. Pell Grants are great for you when you are graduating high school. Apprenticeships are great for you as you are in high school and leaving high school and going into college. These are all things that address the problem when you are ready to enter the workforce. But I think a bigger part of the core problem is addressing this from pre-K to professionals.

There is an initiative we have in our district where we start with students as young as pre-K, start having conversations with students about what their innate abilities and strengths are. If you aren't good at conflict resolution as a kindergartener and you can't keep your hands to yourself, you probably won't be a really good police officer, if you are not innately good at that. It doesn't mean that you can't be, but it is going to be a lot harder path for you to achieve that and be successful in it.

So we have a lot of conversations about students learning about what their abilities are, where their strengths lie, and then helping them understand what careers align with that outside of just their sphere of influence. Because if you grew up in a household where

your dad was a police officer and your grandpa was a police officer and your uncle was a police officer, that is what is familiar to you.

So we have to be very intentional about exposing students to careers outside of what they are immediately in contact with, helping them learn about who they are as individuals, and then helping connect them to careers that align with those so that they can make informed decisions as they move through life.

Mr. CISNEROS. Well, thank you for that answer. I think it is important to kind of work with kids young to find what they are good at and kind of help facilitate that process.

But, Dr. Gunuskey, what would you—how would you do this?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah, absolutely. I think that is a great question.

And what we do at our school is, as ninth graders, all students pick a wide variety of introductory classes that they can take—short, little bursts which are basically a microcosm of the pathways that they can explore.

And then the students, once they pick that pathway, they are able to change if that is something they realize they don't like. Because it is not only important to find out what you want to do for the rest of your life, it is also equally critical to find out what you don't want to do for the rest of your life as early as possible.

But I think it is important—and I will use this analogy—when you talk about taking a variety of classes, I think that, you know, if you were to look at each class as a brick and if you just take a smattering of classes throughout your entire career, at the end of your high school career, you might have a pile of bricks. If you take those within a given pathway, you have taken those bricks and built a foundation of which you can now build your career on.

So that is kind of the idea that we are focusing on, is ensuring that kids are leaving with a firm foundation, not a pile of bricks.

Mr. CISNEROS. All right. Thank you for that.

And, you know, Mr. Boren, let me ask you this, right? I have been told—but I have heard it—and, actually, the Chairman kind of said the same thing here, right? But I have been told by many CEOs, "I don't need more MBAs. I need more welders."

Mr. BOREN. Uh-huh.

Mr. CISNEROS. So how can this Committee help facilitate that process?

Mr. BOREN. Yeah, I think this Committee plays an important role on really helping small employers work together. As I mentioned in my testimony, North Carolina is a great example of how we build consortia of small employers and medium-sized employers with all the similar talent challenges.

You know, I talked about how these employers can come together through group sponsorship programs offered by the U.S. Department of Labor—and certainly in California, it is possible—to bring together the same training under the same roof with the same ability to recruit, build a brand name, just the way we see colleges build a brand name today, and go out and build really first-class training programs.

Mr. CISNEROS. All right.

Well, thank you for those answers.

And I am out of time, so I yield back.

Mr. GIBSON. Mr. Chair, could I just expand on his question?

Chairman WILLIAMS. Ten seconds.

Mr. GIBSON. Ten seconds.

It is how you deliver to the younger generation. They get all their information here. We spend almost 40 percent of our total budget, workforce CTE budget, on social media, pushing out the careers and the pathways——

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman's time is up.

Mr. GIBSON. And so, keep that in mind.

Mr. CISNEROS. Thank you.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Meuser from the great State of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Mr. MEUSER. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses very much.

Dr. Gunuskey, nice to see you.

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Good to see you.

Mr. MEUSER. I know that ride very well that you took on the way down here. And I am also not surprised at all to hear how Congressman Bresnahan was very supportive, as he works real hard for the district, of course, for the long term and the short term. So that is outstanding work. Good to hear.

You know, career and technical schools, we all get it, as far as their importance. All you have to do is walk in one and see a young man, a young lady, who might have their head on the desk in traditional schooling and now has a bounce in their step, they are taking care of business, they love what they are doing. It is fantastic. I love seeing it in the high schools, in the public schools, and then, you know, in the CTEs themselves.

We, fortunately, in my district, right outside of Congressman Bresnahan's district, have some great CTE schools—Penn Tech, for instance, Schuylkill County Technical Center, Northumberland County, Lebanon County Technical Center. We have some great ones—Columbia-Montour, Berks County. Luzerne County Community College has an outstanding program.

Yet they are jammed. And they—they could be more expansive, and the funding is not there, necessarily, for the capacity. And let's face it, as well, the apparatuses and machines that they use are not always available, because they need the latest things in order to develop the skills at the right level.

So it is great how you integrate with—you know, it is really a training ground for a lot of businesses. So I know that is a big piece of it.

Another big piece of it, of course, is, in 2019, our friend from Pennsylvania, actually, GT Thompson, had a lot to do with the Perkins Grants being expanded. So that is very, very important and very meaningful. Last year, Pennsylvania got $50 million. I would like to see that be a lot more than that—double, if not triple.

And, as well, the Pell Grants. Under the BBB, as I think you know, the Pell Grants were expanded from not just a long-term but short-term.

So, really—I mean, I have a list of questions here, but I would really just like to hear from you all, what else do we need to do

to help improve, expand, provide the right equipment to the schools that you are all doing such a great job and dedicated to developing?

I will start with you, Dr. Gunuskey.

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah, I would just say, I think a targeted infrastructure funding model of some kind, where—when you look around the country and you assess the CTCs that are successful, that have 600 kids on a waiting list—which, as I mentioned in my opening, at Monroe County, is sad. I mean, that is something that certainly needs to be addressed. So I think a targeted funding structure would be great.

I also think—and you had mentioned Perkins, and I can't agree more. That is something that certainly supports our funding for career and tech education but in an indirect way. So do the other funding models that we have, including title funding, special-ed funding under IDEA. We have a number of special-needs students who participate in our career and tech ed programs and are able to work and live independently because of those programs.

And so I think identifying all of those sources and just taking a look and seeing if there is anything else where they could be supported would be helpful to our programs.

Mr. MEUSER. That is good that you mixed a little bit of business administration into that——

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah.

Mr. MEUSER.—towards the end of——

Mr. GUNUSKEY. My business administrator will be happy, yes.

Mr. MEUSER. Yeah, good. Good.

Mr. Gibson?

Mr. GIBSON. Congressman, I will tell you, obviously, increasing Perkins funds is one thing, but reaching out and working with trade associations. The reason for that is, we can then reach out to our manufacturer reps and suppliers to donate materials.

We have programs in the high schools and community colleges where we will get a sheet-metal subcontractor to donate a sheet-metal brake, which costs about $150,000 to $200,000 apiece——

Mr. MEUSER. Right.

Mr. GIBSON.—but if they see that that school is committed to CTE programming——

Mr. MEUSER. Yeah.

Mr. GIBSON.—AGC can reach out to our contractors or our subcontractors and suppliers and their manufacturer reps and say, "We want you to get involved."

Why are they going to get involved? Why would Black & Decker donate materials to that? Because they know that those kids are going to be trained on those tools, and they are going to be on the job site and they are going to ask that company to buy those tools that they were trained on.

Mr. MEUSER. Huh.

Mr. GIBSON. So that public-private partnership really pays huge dividends not just with the federal dollars and State dollars but the private dollars that are contributed.

Mr. MEUSER. Maybe some sort of tax deduction for such donations is something we could work on.

Mr. GIBSON. I will tell you, all industries would welcome that.

Mr. MEUSER. Yeah. Okay, great.

Dr. Nix?

Ms. NIX. Perkins funding is amazing, and it does support programs in our district. And when you hear the dollar value at the national level, it sounds really big, but when you look at the dollar value at a local level, our Perkins allocation was just around $20,000.

Mr. MEUSER. Thank you.

Ms. NIX. We have a history——

Mr. MEUSER. I am out of time.

I am very glad you folks are in the positions you are in. Thanks for the great work you do.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Okay.

The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Ms. Goodlander from the great State of New Hampshire for 5 minutes.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to our witnesses for being here today for this really important and exciting hearing.

In New Hampshire, our small businesses are the beating heart of our economy. And I hear the same story everywhere I go, and the data bears this out: A third of our small businesses can't fill basic positions.

It is about recruiting and retaining talent. And the energy and excitement around starting that pipeline as early as possible in our schools is really overwhelming.

You know, as I have talked to and visited our schools and our tech centers—we have more than two dozen across New Hampshire—you know, I hear the same thing from students, who have really lost faith in a traditional 4-year-college path, and for very good reasons. You know, the national student debt balance right now has ballooned to over $1.8 trillion. It is all very understandable. And this is where I really believe the power of career and technical education comes in.

As I have traveled around New Hampshire and seen at Alvirne High School in Hudson the next generation of nurses, I have seen in Claremont at Sugar River Valley Regional Tech Center—multiple generations of people whose lives and livelihoods started right in these tech centers. And it is an inspiration to see.

We have talked about a lot of the barriers that I have heard about again and again. I want to start with funding.

You know, as I look at the federal budget—and, you know, I serve on the Armed Services Committee. It is a trillion-dollar budget for our Pentagon. And when I think about what you are doing with $20,000 in your district, what my State has done in leveraging, you know, $7 million in Perkins Grants, it should be humbling to anyone administering a trillion-dollar budget anywhere in this government.

But, as I understand it, federal funding for career and technical education has fallen since 1980 from around $3.5 billion to just $1.5 billion in 2024.

Mr. Gunuskey, you mentioned that there are several sources of federal funding, including IDEA funding, that is essential to the programs.

And, by the way, I just want to thank—anyone who does the job of superintendent deserves a massive round of applause for what you do, because it is one of the hardest jobs, I think, in our country.

But can you say a little bit more—I mean, I have been very seized by the fact that Congress now has chronically failed to live up to our obligations under IDEA and funding it at the level that we said we would. Can you just speak more to the other sources of funding beyond Perkins that are essential to your programs?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah, absolutely. And there are three that I will highlight.

First is the title funding that we receive, Title I for low-income students. That is imperative in our area, with 60 percent of our students defined as economically disadvantaged. That funding is critical to move our programs forward. As I had mentioned, being over 325 square miles, access to our programs, transportation, is also a very big challenge that we face.

So the Perkins funding is there. One of the items——

Ms. GOODLANDER. So do you use Perkins for transportation?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. We do not use Perkins for transportation. We use the Title I funding for——

Ms. GOODLANDER. [Inaudible.]

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yes. And we can use it for, really, classroom supports, aides that we may have, teachers in our classrooms to support reading and math work as well.

Special education with IDEA is huge, as many of our students require teacher assistants to be with them to help with their instruction, special-education teachers to help process and modify curriculum so that it is understandable for the students. And so that is very important.

And then there is something called a WIOA that I wanted to mention, which is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. And, really, that is super-important in helping us network with our workforce boards. And it is a real collaborative approach that we have been able to work with in our community in just trying to leverage as much funding as we can and collaboration and to having our students have as much experience as possible.

Ms. GOODLANDER. Thank you.

Mr. Boren, you mentioned in your written testimony that the National Apprenticeship Act hasn't been meaningfully modernized in more than 80 years. I really look forward to working with you on that project.

You mentioned that sometimes just the red tape, excessive paperwork, and registration requirements, which can exceed 35 pages, have been a real barrier to getting small businesses involved with apprenticeship programs. And you chronicled some pretty outrageous stories of red tape.

Show us the red tape; let's cut it together. I am out of time, but I appreciate your testimony on this point and look forward to working with you.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Bresnahan from the great State of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to Congressman Meuser for those kind remarks earlier.

And thank you to the witnesses. I know it is quite time-consuming to take time out of your days and your lives to come here and advocate for your causes in front of Congress, but it really does mean a lot.

And, Dr. Gunuskey, thank you for making the trek through the blizzard from northeastern Pennsylvania. And we will be spending some time on Thursday, so should you need a ride home, we will make some room to accommodate.

But one of the first places that I got to visit after becoming a new Member of Congress was your CTE. And something that really stuck with me was the excitement and the passion that we saw from your students, whether that was in the culinary program, the aviation program, the small automotive repair industry.

And something that I also experienced in my last life as being a contractor—I am sure Mr. Gibson would agree—is just the pipeline and availability of the future workforce. And the careers and the education that you are providing for your students are industries and jobs that will never be replaced by artificial intelligence.

And the availability of work and jobs and family-sustaining careers the day after they graduate from your program was something that was certainly inspiring, which led us to support the $3 million community project funding for the enhancement and the new facility that I am really excited for that I assume will be state-of-the-art based off of all of the other programs that you have to offer.

And I think it is an investment that is just one step to ensure that hundreds of students that are eager to pursue a career in skilled trades and technical fields can do so in just an incredibly new facility.

But something else that you do incredibly well was—and I hope that you can provide some insight back to the Committee here on—how you partner with small businesses inside of the community and the curriculum that you are creating matches what the current workforce actually needs.

So are there any examples of successful partnerships with small businesses somewhere within your over-300-mile radius that you can point to that we can have some better insight on?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yes, absolutely. I would be happy to share that.

So one of the reasons that I think our programs are so successful is because they are celebrated and embraced by our community. Our community loves that we have these programs. They see the value in them. They just understand that we need more of them and we need them to grow, we need more participation.

What has, I think, greatly benefited our program—and it is something that I think Pennsylvania does very well—is the requirement for every CTE program to have occupational advisory committees, OAC committees, that meet twice a year. And those committees are required for small businesses, industry professionals, post-secondary institutions to come in and meet with us twice a year, each program, and really dissect what we are doing—looking at our task list, looking at what students are learning,

looking at the equipment that we are utilizing—and giving us feedback as to, are we hitting the mark or are we not? What do we need to change? What do we need to update?

And so I would strongly suggest the OAC to any school who is not doing that. I think that is a strong complement to any program.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. How frequently will you adjust curriculum based off of that feedback?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. After every meeting. So, after every meeting, our teachers will take the feedback and they will begin adjusting task lists for the future.

And, again, that keeps us in sync with the small businesses, who are—again, our small businesses are terrific partners. We would like to have more small-business participation, because we believe that the more numbers that we have, the greater value that we have in our programs and the better feedback that we can receive and make those changes.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. How has the local community and surrounding area been receiving the idea of such a large investment and the idea that, out of—two counties in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are the only two that don't have a dedicated CTE CTC? How has that surrounding community been in response to this initiative?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yes. They have been very supportive, because, once again, they see the need.

As I had mentioned before, the difficulties that we now face with students sharing districts. Having to dis-enroll in one district and re-enroll in another district naturally puts up barriers for students and families that are really—is really inequitable when you look across the entire State, where no other county has to do this except our two counties.

So it has been very well-received and very well-supported.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Well, I appreciate you making the trek out here.

Thank you for all that you all do for your communities, and I look forward to our continued working relationship.

And, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mrs. McIver from the great State of New Jersey for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you so much, Chairman, and thank you to our Ranking Member for convening today's hearing.

I want to thank each of our witnesses for joining us here today, especially with all of the weather and everything going on. Happy that you can be here with us.

Across the country, small businesses are struggling to find workers with the skills they need, while too many young people are questioning whether a traditional, 4-year degree is the only path to economic prosperity. Last December, one-third of small-business owners reported job openings they could not fill.

At the same time, student loan debt is rising, and recent college graduates are experiencing higher unemployment rates than the broader workforce. We must build better bridges between education and the workforce, which we have heard today on this panel.

In my district, we see this both as a challenge and an opportunity. Institutions like Essex County College and Newark Vocational High School are working to empower students. They are helping young people earn industry certifications and hands-on technical skills that align with businesses' needs.

At the same time, initiatives like the Urban League of Essex County's Microenterprise and Skilled Trades Training Center show how partnerships between industry and educators can create pipelines into high-demand careers. This strengthens vocational opportunities in our community. These programs show that, when we invest in practical pathways, we prepare students for well-paying jobs and we ensure that small businesses have the talent they need to compete.

With that, I have one question for Mr. Boren.

Participation in career and technical education programs has remained largely flat for years, and instructor shortages continue to limit expansion in high-demand fields.

From your perspective, what federal policy changes would most effectively expand high-quality CTE pathways and better connect people to apprenticeships and employment opportunities?

Mr. BOREN. That is a great question, Congresswoman.

Mrs. MCIVER. It is a mouthful. It is a mouthful.

Mr. BOREN. And I appreciate the question, because we just have underinvested in CTE and apprenticeships. It was laid out earlier that, you know, we have had 50-percent cuts in CTE since 1980. And, you know, when we look at registered apprenticeship, for every dollar we invest in higher education, we are spending $1,000—or, for every dollar we invest in apprenticeships, we are spending $1,000 on higher education. So there is a huge disparity.

You know, since 2016, we want to thank the Congress for investing in registered apprenticeship. Prior to 2016, the Office of Apprenticeship had absolutely zero dollars, when I started there, to invest in companies and intermediaries and in the trades. Today, we are at $285 million—still kind of a fraction in comparison to the $27 billion or more that we spend on higher education.

So, critically important that we continue to think about modernizing apprenticeships, making them easier for small businesses to start, cutting red tape and some of the paperwork as well as speeding the amount of time that it can take for these programs to get approved.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you so much for that.

And just in the small amount of time that I have left, I would love for each witness if they can—I know many of you have talked about this a little bit. What strategies should Congress support to improve early awareness for these types of non-4-year-college pathways?

Mr. GIBSON. One, setting the tone. Again, I hear—and I have outlawed in my office—"local control," but—local control from the State down to the school districts.

Most of the school districts we talk to—and we have 150 partners, and we have got 300 school districts, so we are on our way to getting 100 percent saturation in terms of participation in CTE. But most of those school districts are looking for direction. They

are looking for direction from the Department of Ed. They are looking for direction out of Washington, D.C.

So I would suggest to you, don't be afraid to set the tone. Because I can promise you, especially in rural America, they are looking for direction, they are looking for help. And you, as the policymakers here in Washington, D.C., can set that tone.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you.

With that, I am running out of time, but I will say, thank you each for all of your, you know, expertise that you shared up here today.

Me, I am a true supporter of skilled trades. I used to work in a school district as a personnel director, and I know how important skilled trades is. And I wish we could have more dollars, more funding to be able to support such. And if I could do it all over again, I would have been an electrician, for sure, okay?

Thank you.

With that, I yield back, Chairman.

Chairman WILLIAMS. That is your new nickname, "The Electrician."

With that, the gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Downing from the great State of Montana for 5 minutes.

Mr. DOWNING. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the witnesses for being here.

You know, it is interesting, I was thinking the other day, it wasn't that long ago when I saw political slogans always talking about creating jobs.

And I travel around my district, and, you know, there are two big limiting factors in small businesses and industry across my district—you know, access to capital and the ability to recruit and retain employees. And that seems to be one of the biggest limiting factors, is finding employees.

And there are so many, you know, issues there, from housing to, you know, trades education to make sure that you have, you know, folks coming in that have the skills necessary. And it really underscores the need for more workforce development, more of this type of training.

And one of the things that I noticed—I am going to start with you, Mr. Gibson. According to a survey conducted by your own association, by the Associated General Contractors of America, 92 percent of construction firms nationally reported having difficulty finding workers to hire.

Can you elaborate on how this shortage of construction workers is impacting the companies that you represent?

Mr. GIBSON. Well, this didn't happen overnight. And one of the components of Build Up Kansas is to change the perception of our industry. Construction has always been an afterthought. Now it is becoming back what it was in the 1950s and 1960s, and that is, a noble profession. And investment, of which Kansas is doing, leading the way on CTE in the Midwest, is providing that pipeline.

But I said earlier, setting a tone. We are setting that pace and that tone to send a message to our membership across the State of Kansas and even across the country that it is a noble profession,

it has got good pay, it has got a good career. And I said "career," not "a job."

Mr. DOWNING. Yeah.

Mr. GIBSON. And you have to also deliver this type education materials the way the younger generation wants to receive it, and that is through social media.

But the bottom line is, it is costing companies in re-work——

Mr. DOWNING. So can I—I want to elaborate on that. And I think that is a really good message, and I appreciate that. But—so to what degree do you believe that this shortage is contributing to the rising costs of both, you know, housing and commercial real estate in this country?

Mr. GIBSON. There is no question about it. Again, if a contractor only has X number of employees and they need Y-plus, they are limited on how many projects they can bid, which limits the competition on commercial, industrial, whatever project it is. The more competition, the better pricing you are going to get and the better quality that you are going to get all the way across the board.

But it has an across-the-board impact on our industry——

Mr. DOWNING. Right.

Mr. GIBSON.—starting with development of workforce.

Mr. DOWNING. And, briefly, what role do you think CTE programs can play in bridging this current skills gap?

Mr. GIBSON. CTE is the number-one issue, the number-one issue, bar none. And that goes for all industries across, but especially construction.

What was the first thing everybody did this morning in getting up? You turned on a light switch, right? Somebody had to install that light switch.

Mr. DOWNING. Right.

Mr. GIBSON. Okay? So point——

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you for those answers. I really like that message.

I am going to turn now to Dr. Gunuskey.

I want to discuss your experience as a superintendent in rural Pennsylvania. So my district, central and eastern Montana, is one of the most rural congressional districts in the country. And rural high school students, notably, participate in CTE programs at significantly higher rates than their suburban and urban counterparts.

So, Dr. Gunuskey, can you elaborate on the benefits of CTE programming and rural education and why these programs are particularly effective in sparsely populated school districts?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah. As I said in my opening statement, I think that, you know, with having the high economically disadvantaged populations that we have, for many of our kids, they get into it as a way of life.

And many of our students, when they graduate, they want to live in our community. And so, fortunately, what we are trying to do is continually match the needs of our community with what we are offering in schools——

Mr. DOWNING. Right.

Mr. GUNUSKEY.—so that the kids can learn, they can contribute to the local economy, they can stay, they don't have to leave, they don't have to leave with college debt.

Mr. DOWNING. So I appreciate that.

And as emerging technologies like AI play an increasingly important role in our society, in what ways do you think CTE programs can be leveraged to best prepare rural students for employment in this future economy?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. That is a great question. And I think what we are seeing is a shift in the interest level of the CTE programs being demanded by students.

Years ago, computers, computer programming, graphic arts—those were the most requested programs.

Mr. DOWNING. Right.

Mr. GUNUSKEY. But, now, AI can create those for you in 2 seconds and create all types of coding.

So, again, everything that we are trying to do is that AI-resistant program that allows—that AI is not going to take over.

Mr. DOWNING. All right. Thank you, Doctor.

It looks like I have run out of time, so, Mr. Chair, I yield.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

And I now recognize Ranking Member Olszewski from the great State of Maryland for 5 minutes.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. Thank you very much, Chairman Williams. I want to thank you and Ranking Member Velázquez for holding this hearing.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for your presence here today.

Mr. Boren, I appreciate that you ground a lot of your work in the teachings of Jesus. And I know that our faith calls us to look at policy as if we are our brother's keeper. And I just want to say first that I respect that you are doing that, and hope that we can continue to see more of that perspective here on Capitol Hill.

I know that you and many others in my State worked hard to pass Maryland's RAISE Act to create more tools and expand registered apprenticeships to new industries, employers, and communities.

During my time as a State delegate, long before I came to Congress, I was proud to be the primary sponsor of the now-nationally-recognized Employment Advancement Right Now Act, or EARN program. For the past decade, EARN has strengthened the State's workforce pipeline to supply local and small businesses with a well-trained workforce and has placed residents into good-paying jobs. Over 11,000 Marylanders have obtained full-time employment because of EARN, and more than 15,000 incumbent workers have benefited from the program's upscaling opportunities.

I would commend to my Chairman and my colleagues on the Committee this successful statewide initiative be explored and perhaps replicated at the federal level.

Back home in my district, Reisterstown's main street is home to the nonprofit Cavanagh House, which hosts a partnering apprenticeship program for upholstery and sewing that matches students with workrooms and experienced tradespeople at industry-leading businesses. These partnerships allow students to refine their skills,

gain invaluable hands-on experience, and build confidence in professional settings.

Unfortunately, as we know, not every small business can provide this type of paid service to train and retain its students as workers, and that is where CTE bridges the gap.

That is why I was proud to partner with Chairman Williams to pass the Connecting Small Business with Career and Technical Education Graduates out of the House last year, a bill that will help match students and graduates of CTE with actual job opportunities through Small Business Development Centers and Women's Business Development Centers.

We will have to get it done in the Senate soon, Mr. Chairman.

We need more of this commonsense type of legislation. Doing so will help ensure that America continues to be a place where small businesses, especially those on main streets, can thrive.

Mr. Boren, I will start with you. We know that small businesses make up 99 percent of employers but just a small fraction of apprenticeship sponsors. Is the main issue the administrative capacity, or are there other barriers we should be tracking?

Mr. BOREN. Yeah, I think the—and thanks for your opening remarks. I do appreciate you being from my home State. And Maryland really being the second-fastest-growing apprenticeship State in the country has a lot to do with the leadership of the Governor and folks like yourself.

And one of the things that we are seeing, where Maryland is leading, is really in pay-for-performance for apprenticeships. So that really came about in the RAISE Act, as you know, and is being undertaken by the State, to pay for what works.

You know, oftentimes we are using federal dollars where we put grants out, bespoke programs, and we hope that they work. This idea around pay-for-performance pays for success when apprentices are gainfully hired, retained, and, ultimately, what we hope to get to in one of our new pilot programs is to where they complete. So, if you are going to start an apprenticeship program, there is no reason why we ought not pay that employer or that apprenticeship sponsor for that completion as well.

One area I just wanted to highlight, too, that I think is really critical for this Committee is helping our veterans. Veterans are a critical component of how small businesses can grow, yet the Post-9/11 GI Bill focuses only on higher education.

If we are to really help expand apprenticeships with small businesses, we need to level the playing field, giving them their full housing benefits and tuition. My calculation looks at, if you choose apprenticeship, you are getting $200,000 less than you would if you decided to go pursue that French lit degree at Brown University.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. That is a really important perspective. Thank you for that.

With my remaining time, 30 seconds, Dr. Nix, what percentage of your CTE graduates are going on to apprenticeships? And do you have any formal partnerships with employers to help create those pathways?

Ms. NIX. In Texas, we have an indicator on accountability called CCMR: College, Career, and Military Readiness. Eighty-six percent of our students graduate with an indicator in one way or another.

Seventy-seven percent of students indicate that through career or military readiness. So a large portion of our students do graduate with that indicator.

Just to add, one barrier that we have in fulfilling apprenticeships are age restrictions and liability that apprentice providers face as far as housing students underage in their facilities.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. Hm.

I appreciate all that feedback, and thank you all for the work. Sorry I didn't have time for questions for everybody, but thanks again for being here.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Congressman Schmidt from the great State of Kansas for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing.

And thanks again to our witnesses for being here. I think it has been a great discussion.

I want to look a little more down the road toward the horizon here and talk about maybe some spin-offs and some entrepreneurship issues. And I am going to start with Mr. Gibson and then go down the line to the extent that my time allows here.

I am from a fairly little town. We have about 10,000 people now. My wife is from the Kansas City metro area. When we were first contemplating getting married—she is from a town of 2.5 million people if you count the metro, and I told her, "Well, I am from the biggest town in my area too," and I didn't disclose all the details. Sometimes our local dynamics were a little different.

And, you know, one thing that strikes me—and I hear it everywhere I go. We hear the same dynamics, that we don't have enough plumbers, we don't have enough electricians, we don't have enough carpenters. But, in our world, that is not just having more folks at our regional construction companies, whether it is a Key or a Crossland or a Hutton—you know, we all have those. It is also having folks in our local communities who do that.

And they are often mom-and-pop shops. They are somebody who hung out, you know, at Bob's Carpentry and Joe's Plumbing, and they either don't have employees or they have one or two or they have them ad hoc, and they live in a community. And, at least anecdotally, it sure looks to me like in big parts of the area I represent we have fewer of those folks than we did a generation ago.

So here is what I am wondering. Let's assume—you know, Mr. Gibson, your literature talks about needing 58,000 more workers in the CTE space over the next 5 years in Kansas. That is great. Let's assume we succeed in that through a combination of all these great things we are talking about.

Here is what I am guessing. Tell me if I am right or not. I am guessing that, out of the several thousand young folks that we encourage and support and they get into this field and they become carpenters, plumbers, electricians, whatever—metal workers—with these midsize companies, larger companies, some portion of them are going to have life events that make them decide they want to go back home, or they don't want to work for somebody else, they want to hang out their own shingle, and they want to raise their

kids where they were raised or near grandparents or whatever, and those may be in smaller communities.

What do we need to be thinking about—this is the Small Business Committee. What do we need to be thinking about now, as you are growing workers, to also be identifying and be prepared to help grow the entrepreneurs who spin off 5 years from now, 10 years from now, and become that next generation?

Mr. Gibson?

Mr. GIBSON. The lion's share of the contractors that I represent are small to medium-size firms. A lot of them started in entry-level positions and worked their way up. In fact, one of the contractors I wanted to bring with me today—and I don't think he will mind if I say who it is—Jeromy Bartz, Bartz Construction.

He came out of a construction management program at Kansas State, went to work for McCownGordon, which is a large firm, got 7, 8 years of experience. But his hometown is Great Bend, Kansas, a very rural community, but he saw a niche. There wasn't a general contractor in that area. And he and another McCownGordon employee decided to break off and start their own company. And they started that company 3 years ago, and they are serving that area very well.

But I go back to my story about the mayor that was looking for a backhoe operator. If you don't have craftspeople in your community—and a lot of these folks that are coming out of CTE programs want to stay close to home. And we are giving them that life skill early on, because they are not interested in going to college or they can't afford to go to college, and they are finding their way to stay close to home and meet their future spouse. We are starting to see population growth versus out-migration of population, all because of CTE programming.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Thank you, Mr. Gibson.

Dr. Gunuskey, you mentioned entrepreneurship in your opening. That caught my attention. And, you know, just because you are a great plumber and electrician doesn't mean you know how to handle HR issues or tax prep issues or advertising issues. What do we need to be doing with the SBA or otherwise?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah, I think—and that is a great question.

What we do is, we bake entrepreneurship into all of our programs. So, regardless of the career pathway that the students are in, kids have a rich exposure in entrepreneurship.

Through that, students also participate in something called our seminar programs, where they have a rich understanding of financial literacy, what it takes to start a business, to own a business, public relations, answering a phone call, all of the little things that mean so much today.

So I think, as we are doing this as a country, I think entrepreneurship has to be baked in across the board.

Mr. GIBSON. Congressman, I would just say, the Small Business Administration is a great connector to CTE programs because of the resources that they provide, just as the doctor talked about, not only technical resources but financial resources. And small business coming out of CTE programs could definitely be that great connector to the Small Business Administration.

Mr. SCHMIDT. Thank you.

My time has expired.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields.

And I now recognize Dr. Morrison from the great State of Minnesota for 5 minutes.

Ms. MORRISON. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member, for holding this hearing.

And thanks to our witnesses for being here today. This has been a really great conversation.

Workforce training and development is critical, of course, to both helping our small businesses grow and ensuring the next generation of the skills they need to succeed and advance.

Minnesota's Third District is proud to be the home of Anoka Technical College, Hennepin Technical College, and Normandale Community College, which provide higher education and training through career and technical programs to ensure their students are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in today's and tomorrow's workforce.

I had the honor of visiting Normandale Community College, actually, just last week and hearing about how they are shaping and preparing Minnesota's workforce.

AI is increasingly impacting the way we work and changing the skills that employers are looking for in their employees. A common concern I hear from recent graduates entering the workforce is that AI is replacing many entry-level jobs. During my visit to Normandale, I learned about how they are training students to do jobs that AI can never replace.

Mr. Boren, how can apprenticeships, technical education programs, and community colleges help ensure that students have the skills they need to succeed in an increasingly AI-driven job market and they are able to find a job now and in the future?

Mr. BOREN. I think you are exactly right, Congresswoman. We are seeing a hollowing out of the entry-level labor market due to AI replacing that early-level, entry-level jobs.

The challenge is, you know, we are going to need these folks later on too, and we need to get them in the workforce today. Nobody can wait 5 or 6 years to get into the workforce.

And that is where apprenticeship, especially registered apprenticeship, is a flexible, industry-driven training program, where employers drive the learning. It is not a train-and-pray model. It is where we invest today in apprenticeships, as we have since 2016, and we see an 80-percent increase in the number of employers and the number of apprentices being engaged in a variety of fields.

One of the exciting things is that, since we have invested, we see more than 50 percent of apprenticeships now being outside of the trades. So they can be in insurance, in healthcare, in IT. A number of different industries are now investing.

Ms. MORRISON. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Perfect segue to my next question for you. I am a doctor by training, and I am really worried about the growing shortage of healthcare workers and how this impacts access to care, especially in our rural communities.

So, Mr. Boren, during your testimony, you mentioned that you have worked directly with small businesses as an apprenticeship

intermediary, recruiting employers, designing programs, and helping companies across sectors, including healthcare, launch apprenticeship programs that meet workforce needs.

Can you elaborate on how registered apprenticeships can help address workforce challenges, such as staffing shortages, in the healthcare industry?

Mr. BOREN. Well, that is right. I am actually really excited to be here with my wife today, who is a registered nurse. But she ended up going the route of getting a master's degree. But we are seeing more States like Texas, Michigan, and a number of States create registered apprenticeship programs for nursing, where you don't need to go into debt. You can start that registered apprenticeship, where you are learning at the hospital with a preceptor, and that continuum goes on, up to receiving your license as an RN.

But we see those shortages in a number of occupations just like that, whether that is surgical technicians or physical therapists, radiologists—a number of occupations that are now being created for apprenticeships. But we still have a lot of licensing barriers at the State levels that don't allow those apprentices to have that hands-on learning that we really need some relief from that regulatory burden at the State.

Ms. MORRISON. And you kind of touched on this, but what skills do apprenticeships teach that can't be taught in conventional classrooms?

Mr. BOREN. Well, they teach the hands-on. So, I mean, when you are in a classroom, you are learning it by theory. When you are on the job, you are learning directly from a mentor who—and a journeyperson who has done that work as a full professional.

And, in fact, we are seeing what is interesting about apprenticeships is, 85 percent of apprentices today are men, and a lot of the last few administrations have treated that as a flaw, not a feature. We are seeing a number of men drop out of college, not being able to return, and apprenticeships are this great way where men—and research is showing that men really do well when they have that hands-on learning. And it is a great way to get them into a great career that pays really well as well.

Ms. MORRISON. Thank you so much. And a quick thank you to your wife for taking care of patients.

Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Wied from the great State of Wisconsin for 5 minutes.

Mr. WIED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to all the witnesses that are testifying here today.

For far too long, our education system has prioritized 4-year colleges and has treated CTE education as an afterthought. Despite our nation's clear need for skilled tradesmen and a high demand from students, we have continued to see a lack of resources allocated to these programs.

CTE programs offer a less expensive alternative to a 4-year degree, and students often graduate in as little as 18 months, prepared for good-paying, in-demand careers.

In northeastern Wisconsin, many high schools and technical colleges partner with local small businesses to ensure students can

begin an apprenticeship immediately after graduation. This not only provides students with paid hands-on experience but also helps small businesses connect with eager, hardworking students.

I am encouraged by the work of our witnesses here and all that you have done to bring technical education back into the high school curriculum. The demand from schools in my district for CTE education underscores the pressing need for these programs.

Like all of you, I feel very strongly about this issue, and I remain committed to supporting CTE in schools in northeastern Wisconsin and, of course, across our nation.

Dr. Gunuskey, from the great school district of Wallenpaupack, obviously you are doing a great job. And what I am impressed with is—and you had mentioned—the community support. And that is key to building, you know, the vocational education, of course, in your district. And you also have great small-business support in your area.

What advice would you give to other school districts, maybe some best practices of things that have gone very well, in order to build the culture that you have? We have questions. A lot of districts in our area want to improve. And so what would you offer to them?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. First and foremost, seeing is believing. Invite them in. Invite them in to see the programs, to meet with the students, to participate in OACs, to contribute.

Many times, we will have organizations and industry partners come in, and they didn't necessarily see how they fit into the overall picture of the curriculum, how they can support the CTE. And so, by bringing them in, it does not take them very long to realize that they are very integral in part. So I would say, seeing is believing is absolutely critical.

In our school, we don't have—we have a pre-apprenticeship program but not a full apprenticeship program, because, again, we are not a CTC. But we do have students in the healthcare field that are actually working in the hospital for half a day, going out to—rehabilitation aide, PT, OT, PTAs—for half a day, getting that hands-on experience.

Mr. WIED. We have a lot of great districts that do very well in vocation. Luxemburg-Casco, for one, has built, over a long time, great community support, great support with local businesses.

Mr. Gibson, what would you say, maybe some of the things that—some big wins that you have seen in partnering with local school districts? What would you say to contractors and businesses? What can we do better?

Mr. GIBSON. Well, Build Up Kansas has—its success has come down—and the doctor talked about advisory councils, industry advisory councils. I would go one step farther. One of the things that has been successful is not only bringing industry in to share what type of professions they are looking for, but we bring in recent graduates of that high school CTE program, because they can relate to that younger generation better than the contractor. And that has really turned a lot of heads.

In fact, I mentioned about social media. If you go to Build Up Kansas—BuildUpKS.com, you will see testimonies of a lot of students that have graduated out of the high school CTE programs.

Matter of fact, I mentioned Panasonic. One of our community colleges up in Topeka, Washburn Technology, graduated 300 electrical technicians. All of them received contracts to go to work for Panasonic.

So get the industry and recent students that have graduated from their local schools to tell the story, and I can tell you, you will get a lot of heads turning to CTE programming.

Mr. WIED. That is fantastic.

Clearly, technical colleges we are talking about. But apprenticeships—Mr. Boren, what are—that you have seen—what are some best practices in building this community engagement and, you know, the relationships with school districts that you have done, that others could use around the country?

Mr. BOREN. Yeah. And I just congratulate Wisconsin on being the oldest and one of the most robust apprenticeship States——

Mr. WIED. Uh-huh.

Mr. BOREN.—who has done a great job with youth apprenticeship.

But I also look to Iowa, who has created high schools as sponsors, working as sponsors of apprenticeship programs, working across different industries, from being a butcher to being a cybersecurity analyst. You can do it, if you create the program at the high school level.

Mr. WIED. Great.

Thank you all.

I yield back.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Jack from the great State of Georgia for 5 minutes.

Mr. JACK. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank our witnesses for testifying today.

I would be remiss if I didn't open my remarks walking you all through something that was very special to my district.

Just last month, I brought our Secretary of Education, Linda McMahon, to my district. And, just for reference, I represent a part of Georgia that is just southwest of Atlanta, includes Coweta County. And, very specifically, within it, we have got a Central Educational Center. And this is—this provided, frankly, for the State a blueprint for success for how high schools can better prepare our students to be well-equipped for the ever-evolving workforce in today's technological age.

And I say that because—we brought the Secretary of Education. We have had, you know, a lot of important people come but never a Cabinet Member. I was proud to bring her. And what they did is—effectively, this community, Newnan, Georgia, about 30, 40 years ago, they said, we have high school students that are graduating that are not prepared for the workforce that we have now recruited to come into our communities, so we have to partner with our school and provide an opportunity for students to leave the school place during the day for a small period of time, go learn some technical skills, and then come back and participate just as they normally would.

This blueprint was so successful—Central Educational Center, I encourage anybody to look at it—that the State of Georgia has now

replicated it in over 60 counties. They literally copy-paste-replace in different cities and counties around the State. So I am very proud of that.

And, in that vein, if I could, I just want to start with Mr. Gunuskey.

So, as you think—and we have talked about this today. As we think about this global economy that we have today, new technologies constantly evolving, how can schools better integrate these kinds of tools and training into career and technical education? How does that help support small businesses that rely on a skilled, adaptable workforce?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Effective communication—communication with the small businesses, communication with your county and community.

And I applaud what you have done in Georgia. And the work that they have done certainly is a great example of that communication—groups coming together, having effective communication, finding out what needs to be done, what workforce needs to be met, and how the schools can implement those strategies to supplement the workforce locally.

Mr. JACK. And what would you say the biggest barriers are for schools that want to adopt and maintain these types of projects? How can federal policy help break down some of those barriers to help more students get to enjoy this?

Mr. GUNUSKEY. Yeah. I know we talked about funding, because funding is the—is probably the biggest hurdle.

I think in rural Pennsylvania another issue that we are facing—and I know my colleague mentioned this before—is also the staffing, the CTE teacher shortage that we are experiencing. It is very difficult.

A starting teacher at Wallenpaupack is right around $60,000. So, when you take somebody out of industry who is making significantly more than that, invite them in and say, "Here, now you can teach 12 to 15 kids, and you have to go back to college to get certification," it is not very enticing.

And so it is something that we are continually trying to work on. And so, if there was any type of, you know, work that we could do with potential industry teachers to come back and help, you know, be teachers in the classroom, it would be significant.

Mr. JACK. Well, thank you very much.

If I can next move to Mr. Gibson.

I would also be remiss if I didn't note my colleague to my right, Congressman Schmidt. We were just talking about you. I was with Marty Jackley, the attorney general for South Dakota, who said you were one of the best attorneys general he's served with. So you are well-represented in Kansas, and I want to——

Mr. GIBSON. Absolutely.

Mr. JACK.—make that clear for the record.

But, as I mentioned, in my district, the Central Educational Center, of which I am very proud, was created because the community recognized that students needed to access training to compete in this changing economy.

And I am curious, from your perspective, how, too, do you see—especially within the workforce that you have to recruit, you know,

what type of educational opportunities would you like to see better provided for students coming out of some of these technical schools?

And, frankly, I also have to ask—you know, we are seeing a more autonomous workforce. I see it across factories I visit all the time. And, obviously, you are more focused on general contracting. But I am curious, how do we prepare ourselves for this autonomous workforce that is coming?

Mr. GIBSON. Well, first, I want to build on the question. Instructors are critical. We are losing instructors as fast as we are losing the older generation.

And, through our HR platform, we are giving the schools the ability to post their jobs. We have actually had experience of bringing back recently retired tradesmen to come back and teach at a local school. We actually got the State to change the legislation to where they didn't have to have a Ph.D. or a master's to teach——

Mr. JACK. Huh.

Mr. GIBSON.—if it was regarding technical training.

But the key in getting everything to a point where CTE becomes important is training.

We use the NCCER curriculum because it was developed by the construction industry with education in mind. It has a credential that goes along with it. The contractors—and I represent general contractors, subs, and suppliers—they are migrating to it because there is a proven curriculum that the schools are embracing.

And that credential that comes along with it is like a high school diploma, to where they can demonstrate—like, for example, the core has blueprint reading, OSHA 10-hour safety, hand tools, power tools. All of that accumulates like a high school degree, to where that applicant can show that contractor what skills they have to go to work immediately in the industry.

Mr. JACK. Thank you, Mr. Gibson.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Chairman WILLIAMS. The gentleman yields back.

And I want to thank our witnesses today for your testimony.

And I want you to go home and—I always get asked, can't you reach across the aisle with these guys and gals? I think you have seen we can do that. A pretty good hearing today. We were just remarking, there wasn't—I mean, we all agree on everything. So this is great. We will get something done. And that is not true everywhere, but here, we all agree on everything right now.

But, anyway, without objection, Members have 5 legislative days to submit additional materials and written questions for the witnesses to the Chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses.

I ask the witnesses to please respond promptly if that happens.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:52 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Testimony for Dr. Keith E. Gunuskey, Superintendent, Wallenpaupack Area School District

Before the United States House Small Business Committee Hearing: "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success"

Current State of Career and Technical Education (CTE)

The topic of this hearing is near and dear to my heart and one that this incredibly impactful for the future of the United States. In education, there is a myth that I often share with families called "The 4-year lie." This principle surrounds the notion that for decades it was thought that they only way to achieve the American Dream was for students to attend a minimum of a 4-year college/university and then joining the workforce. Sadly, this believe has led to over 1.7 trillion dollars in student loans. Furthermore, there remains seven million jobs in the US that are vacant that do not require a college degree and are considered life sustaining wage occupations. Often times graduating college students have no other choice but to assume jobs that are not aligned with their degree, or jobs that didn't require a degree in the first place.

Fortunately, families are beginning to see the light and ask "is there a better way?" The answer is "yes" and the answer is Career and Technical Education (CTE). How about zero debt and being highly skilled and trained allowing students to jump into the workforce after they graduate high school? Doesn't it make sense to test students interests and passions early in a students high school years and align them with a career pathway that is focused on their desires? Again, the answer is clear. Our high school is a perfect example of this change in thought as over 40% of our high school students attend a CTE program.

The Problem

Interest in CTE is growing throughout Pennsylvania and across the country! I had the opportunity to attend a CTE inservice this past summer in Pittsburgh. Speaking with my colleagues in the field, the stories were all the same: everyone has a waiting list. The majority of Career and Technology Centers (CTCs) were built in the late 60's and early 70's, and mainly for students were considered "non academic" and not going to college. For decades, these schools were highly successful and supplied our workforce with mechanics, plumbers, builders, etc. Yet, the model that CTC's had mastered of skill building, apprenticeship, school-to-work, etc. was kept secret and success stories were seldom shared and celebrated. As CTE programs have expanded and opened the doors for more opportunities, programs like engineering, aviation, and exercise science and sports medicine have become a real option for students. By implementing the same tenets of the old vocational education, of a laser-like focus on skills and certifications, CTE has grown significantly among today's youth.

The problem lies in that CTC's are now victims of their own success, as these older CTC's were built for "the few" and not "the many." There are safety restrictions (and rightfully so) for student enrollment in workspace. Simply put, CTC's cannot accommodate the student demand for many of their programs. The demand for Career and Technical Education in rural Pennsylvania far exceeds current capacity. Regional technical centers operate at maximum

enrollment, with hundreds of students waiting for placement. For example, the Monroe County Technical Institute reports a waiting list of more than 600 students. This represents lost opportunity—not only for students, but for the small businesses that depend on skilled local talent.

In addition, the cost of running a CTC can become rather expensive. Whereas a traditional school purchases textbooks, CTC's must purchase textbooks along with equipment and machinery that reflects industry standards. A final problem is that CTCs are not a taxing entity, like public school districts. Therefore, they rely solely on the tuition paid by member school districts. As school district budgets tighten, there is often less money made available to CTCs. Purchasing new, industry-aligned becomes extremely challenging.

The Economic Impact

Over the years, I've had multiple meetings with our Economic Development Authorities in Wayne and Pike Counties. I have heard consistently over the years that one of the first questions prospective companies ask when they are considering moving into our area is "do you have a CTC?" Sadly, Wayne and Pike Counties are the only two counties in the entire state of Pennsylvania that do not have a CTC. Although we are working to fix this, the message to these prospective companies is clear- our area must not value a skilled, highly trained workforce. Unfortunately, economic growth in our area has been stifled because we lack a CTC. The conversation with prospective company has been simple in that they believe a workforce is one of the most parts of infrastructure that must be in place for an area to be a desirable landing spot for a business. Sadly, many people of infrastructure to only mean central sewer, sustainable water, city gas, etc. But the fact remains without the workforce to support an organization all the other infrastructure pieces are worthless.

Our solution

Wallenpaupack Area School District, along with Wayne Highlands, Western Wayne, and Delaware Valley are looking to bring meaningful change to Wayne and Pike Counties through the creation a new Wayne Pike CTC- a $52 million dollar, 72,000 sq. ft. building that completes the CTE puzzle in Pennsylvania and brings meaningful CTE programs to every corner of the state. Fortunately, Representative Bresnahan visited our school and area and witnessed the potential for growth first hand. Through his leadership and the support of Senators McCormick and Fetterman, the Wayne Pike CTC was awarded $3 million in federal funding to launch this project. In addition, Wallenpaupack Area School District has borrowed the first $10 million dollars to finalize the building development phase, with the hopes of breaking ground late summer, early fall 2026. The new, larger building will allow for new program creation, and increased enrollment in current programs.

Another focus of our district has been to continually incorporate small business partners and post-secondary institutions into our discussions. Business partners, in general, know what they need and they don't. Collaborating with them about program development, course curriculum equipment purchases, and industry standards creates an environment where we can graduate students who are ready to jump into the workforce if they desire. To ensure students are not

pigeonholed into the workforce alone, we align with post-secondary institutions, to ensure that students are gaining college credits while in school. If students choose to continue their education, all students in our CTE programs have the opportunity to bank college credits, while in high school. For those who continue to college, the credit savings and less time spent in college has incredible benefits.

In our region, approximately 60 percent of students come from economically disadvantaged households. For many of these families, Career and Technical Education is not simply an option—it is a gateway to financial security. CTE provides access to stable careers, reduces student debt, and supports upward mobility.

Equally important, it helps retain talent in rural communities. When young people can build meaningful careers locally, they are more likely to remain, invest, and contribute to community life. This strengthens small businesses, stabilizes local economies, and supports generational growth.

Recommendations for action (solutions)

Based on my experience, I respectfully offer several recommendations for how this Committee can further strengthen the connection between CTE and small business success:

1. **Increase Targeted Infrastructure Funding**
   Prioritize rural and underserved regions for facility modernization and expansion.
2. **Support Employer-Based Training**
   Provide financial incentives for small businesses that host apprentices, interns, and trainees.
3. **Encourage Public–Private Partnerships**
   Develop grant programs that promote collaboration between schools, employers, and workforce agencies.
4. **Modernize Training Equipment**
   Establish dedicated funding streams for industry-standard tools and technology.
5. **Simplify Participation Requirements**
   Reduce administrative burdens that discourage small business involvement.
6. **Promote Entrepreneurship Pathways**
   Expand funding for student business development, mentoring, and startup support.
7. **Address Transportation Barriers**
   Support access to training sites and work-based learning locations in rural areas.
8. **Create Flexible Microgrants**
   Enable small employers to participate through low-barrier funding options.

Closing

Career and Technical Education represents one of the most effective investments our nation can make in economic resilience. It prepares workers. It supports entrepreneurs. It strengthens communities. When CTE systems are well-funded and well-aligned with local industry, small businesses thrive and families prosper.

The progress underway in Wayne and Pike Counties demonstrates what can be achieved through thoughtful policy and strategic investment. With continued leadership from this Committee, similar success can be realized in rural communities across the country.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to America's workforce. I look forward to our discussion.

Chair, Roger Williams and House Committee on Small Business Members:

2/24/26 Hearing on – "Career & Technical Education (CTE): Developing the Future of Main Street Success"

Introduction - My name is Mike Gibson, Executive Vice President for Associated General Contractors (AGC) Kansas, which is recognized as the **"Chamber of Commerce for the Kansas Construction Industry"** and AGC represents 300 Kansas union/non-union construction firms and their 20,000 employees. AGC of Kansas is a chartered association member of AGC of America which is the largest construction trade association in the U.S.

Purpose of this Testimony - I am appearing before you today to share with you the many successes and best practices delivered by AGC's Build Up Kansas workforce development program. This public-private-partnership between the State of Kansas, Kansas Educators and the Construction Industry have a laser focus mission to bring back Career & Technical Education (CTE) in all Kansas high schools, community colleges and vo-tech colleges.

History - For a historical perspective, 40 years ago there were directives to education to prepare all students to attend college. These directives shifted the lion share of federal/state/local resources to college prep initiatives. As a result, the country saw a systematic dismantling of technical trade (shop classes) in most of the high schools/community colleges across the country. Over the last decade it has been realized that the lion share of high school students, either can't afford to attend college and/or are not interested in college.

So, **what do students, not going to college have to fall back on?**

In Kansas, there is major focus on bringing back Career & Technology Education (CTE) programs in all high schools/community colleges/vo-tech colleges. This effort is to provide life skills and industry recognized credentials to students to be eligible for employment into professional careers in the construction industry and other Kansas industries (i.e. agriculture, manufacturing, aviation, energy, healthcare and many other professions). These efforts are now giving rural and urban students hope that obtaining life skills with technical training will give them opportunities to be employed in the region they grew up in and remain in their home state.

CTE Programs are a TOP Priority in Kansas - How is Kansas making CTE programs a priority in Kansas high schools, community colleges and vo-tech colleges?

Five years ago, Panasonic Corporation was seeking to relocate their $ 5 billion battery plant from California to another state. Panasonic narrowed down their search to Tulsa Oklahoma and DeSoto Kansas.

The #1 Question that Panasonic asked Kansas Policymakers and the Kansas Department of Commerce, in choosing Kansas to invest $ 5 billion dollars into building their battery plant was – "CAN YOU BUILD AND CAN YOU MAINTAIN OUR FACILITY".

Panasonic's Question to Kansas policymakers prompted these policymakers to turn to AGC of Kansas to form public-private-partnership. This partnership included supplemental funding from the State of Kansas to accelerate AGC's Build Up Kansas workforce development efforts.

Build Up Kansas Leads the Way on CTE Programs

In less than three (3) years, AGC of Kansas' Build Up Kansas has become the largest workforce development program not only in Kansas but also in the mid-west. Build Up Kansas has launched the following CTE programs, that include options for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programming:

RESULTS

- 150+ High Schools, Community Colleges and Vo-Tech Colleges.
- 10,000+ students enrolled into CTE/Vocational NCCER Trade programs:
  - **Carpentry**
  - **Welding**
  - **Electrical**
  - **HVAC**
  - **Sheetmetal**
  - **Plumbing**
  - **Core**
- **21% of the students are women.**
- 300+ certified instructors teaching these CTE programs.
- Over 100,000+ industry recognized credentials issued per year.

Build Up Kansas has partnered with the **National Center for Education & Research** in the use of NCCER construction trade training materials. NCCER, based in Alachua, Florida – www.nccer.org, is the largest utilized trade materials in the public-school systems (nearly 4,000 U.S. educational institutions).

State Funding for Build Up Kansas pays for:

- **NCCER Textbooks & Virtual Materials for the students (NCCER Connect)**
- **NCCER Train the Trainer for the Instructor Certifications.**
- **NCCER on-line Testing for Student Credentials.**

NCCER CTE materials are approved by:

- **U.S. Dept of Labor**
- **U.S. Dept of Education**
- **U.S. Dept of Justice**
- **Kansas Board of Regents** (oversee the Kansas University/Community Colleges)
- **Kansas Dept of Education**
    - **Note – AGC of Kansas is the #4 user in the U.S. of NCCER materials.**

Connecting the CTE Students to Professional Careers in the Industry via Social Media - Build Up Kansas has incorporated a Human Resource Platform (powered by Arcoro, equivalent to Indeed, Glass Door) and provides this HR Platform to the industry to post their job openings by craft and by city across Kansas/Region. Build Up Kansas utilizes social media to **"geo-fence"** all partnering schools and showcases this HR Platform to CTE Students for opportunities for the CTE students to download their resumes and send these resumes directly to the HR Director that posted the job opening for a job interview.

How CTE Programs Play a Critical Role in Supporting U.S. Economic Development Efforts – CTE programs, provide valuable career paths for students for the younger generation to obtain an industry recognized credential in seeking employment opportunities in their local communities. CTE programs energize a pipeline of skilled workers to support this country's economic development efforts. In fact, AGC of Kansas refers to CTE Instructors as ***"economic developers"***, because without CTE instructors we don't have skilled workers to support business and industry.

Recommendations for Congressional Consideration on CTE programs.

AGC of Kansas would recommend the following:

- **Increase funding for Carl Perkins Grants**
- Recommendation to the Administration:
  - Establish a **"CTE Czar" within the Dept of Labor**
    - Serve as the point person for business/industry and education on CTE issues and resources from the federal government.
- **Establish Matching Federal Funding as incentives to States to implement CTE program:**
  - States that invest in CTE Programming would have opportunities to have Federal Matching Funds to accelerate valuable CTE programs.
    - Similar to the state incentives for Highway Transportation Funding.
- **Congressional Directives to have the Department of Labor and Department of Education work with trade associations:** State/Federal agencies should partner with trade associations in forming public-private-partnerships on CTE programs. Trade Associations have a wide range of relationships with state/local policymakers, state/local agencies, educators and their respective industry members can bring immediate solutions to their community's workforce development needs and solutions to addressing workforce shortages.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Kansas and its Build Up Kansas Workforce Development program and the State of Kansas, thank you for your tireless dedication and leadership to this great nation and to your respective states. It is much appreciated.

Mike Gibson

Executive Vice President

Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Kansas - Wichita Kansas

Written Testimony of Nikki Nix, Ed.D.
Chief Academic Officer
Godley Independent School District (Godley, Texas)
Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business
"Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success"
February 24, 2026

Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the critical connection between Career and Technical Education (CTE) and the future of our nation's workforce.

My name is Dr. Nikki Nix, and I serve as Chief Academic Officer for Godley Independent School District in Texas. I assumed this role in 2026 after serving as Chief Readiness Officer in 2025 and Director of Career and Technical Education beginning in 2022.

I earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Business Computer Information Systems from Midwestern State University, a master's degree in educational technology leadership from Lamar University, and completed my Doctor of Education degree at Arkansas State University in December 2023.

With more than 20 years in public education, I began my career in Wichita Falls as a business and audio/video teacher at Rider High School. I later taught business and audio/video courses in Burleson ISD, served as a dual enrollment instructor with Hill College, worked as an academic advisor at Lake Dallas High School, and became CTE coordinator for Grand Prairie ISD. Prior to joining Godley ISD, I served as CTE director and oversaw The MILE, an innovative secondary campus in Midlothian ISD.

I also serve on the board of directors for the Godley Chamber of Commerce and am a member of the Godley Lions Club, reinforcing my belief that education and local business must work hand in hand.

Overview of Godley ISD

Godley ISD covers more than 122 square miles, primarily in Johnson County, with small areas extending into Hood and Tarrant counties. We are located just southwest of Fort Worth along the Chisholm Trail Parkway.

Our district serves approximately 3,300 students across six campuses and is one of the fastest-growing school districts in our region. The Godley community is largely rural and

residential, supported by small businesses and retail, with limited large-scale industry. That reality makes intentional workforce development partnerships even more essential.

We offer Career and Technical Education programs at both Godley High School and Godley Middle School, ensuring that career exploration begins early and pathways are intentional.

The WILD: Redefining Workforce Preparation

In April 2024, we opened The WILD — the Wildcat Innovative Learning Destination — a four-story Career and Technical Education center at Godley High School. Intentionally designed to dual purpose space and save taxpayer money, The WILD combines a traditional football stadium with 77,000 sq feet of academic learning space. From the highway, it may resemble a stadium. In reality, it is a launchpad for student readiness and workforce development.



The building functions as academic space all day, every day and dual purposes for event or game space after hours. The WILD houses more than 40 classrooms, labs, collaboration spaces, and student-run enterprises designed to mirror professional environments.





Collaboration spaces for student learning during the school day, double as traditional press box spaces on game night. In utilizing the structural design of the building to support event seating and dual-purposing academic learning spaces, the district saved local taxpayers an estimated $55 million dollars.





Our programs blend rigorous academics with hands-on, real-world learning aligned to industry standards. Student readiness is a cornerstone of Godley ISD's Community-Based Accountability System. Through CTE, students graduate prepared for college, careers, military service, or immediate entry into the workforce. They develop technical skills alongside communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and professionalism — the skills employers consistently identify as essential.

Since opening The WILD, we have seen increased student enrollment in CTE programs. Students are drawn to authentic labs, real-world equipment, and coursework that leads to tangible credentials and career opportunities.

Texas provides weighted state funding for students enrolled in CTE courses, which is critical in sustaining high-quality programs.

However, local funding capacity remains a challenge. In fast-growth communities like ours, increases in the state homestead exemption limit local revenue growth. This directly affects our ability to expand facilities and meet the demand students have for high-quality workforce programs.



Programs of Study



Our programs of study include:

- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (agribusiness, animal science, applied agriculture engineering, plant science)
- Arts, AV Technology & Communications (digital communications, graphic design & multimedia arts)
- Business, Marketing & Finance (entrepreneurship)
- Education & Training (teaching & training)
- Health Science (exercise & wellness, healthcare therapeutic)
- Human Services (family & community services)
- Information Technology (IT support & services)
- Engineering (drone- unmanned vehicle)

Future added programming could include Culinary Arts, eSports/Gaming & Coding, Construction Trades and JROTC. These programs are driven by local work-force demand and student interest.

Industry-Based Certifications

Students can earn industry-based certifications after passing rigorous exams. Current certifications include:



- Adobe Certified Professional (multiple design pathways)
- American Welding Society D 9.1 (Sheet Metal)
- CompTIA IT Fundamentals (ITF+)
- Educational Aide I
- Elanco animal science certifications
- Emergency Medical Technician – Basic
- Entrepreneurship & Small Business
- FAA Part 107 Drone Pilot
- Patient Care Technician
- Texas State Florists Association certification

These credentials provide measurable workforce value before students ever graduate high school.

Career and Technical Student Organizations

Our students engage in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs), including:

- FFA - Future Farmers of America
- Godley Squadron (Drone)
- HOSA - Future Health Professionals
- Robotics
- TAFE - Texas Association of Future Educators
- TSA - Technology Student Association
- Wildcat Media



These organizations build leadership, entrepreneurship, and real-world skills aligned with small business and workforce needs.

Internships and Workforce Pipeline

Through intentional partnerships with local businesses and industry professionals, we provide internships during high school. Some students secure employment immediately after graduation with the same businesses that mentored them; however, due to our local economy being supported mostly by small businesses, it is sometimes difficult to find local internship placements for all of our students. Small businesses often do not have the budget to house multiple interns or apprentices but could greatly benefit from additional labor.

Local professionals and our commuter residents, serve as mentors, guest speakers, mock interviewers, and subject-matter experts. In a largely residential community, relationships with our commuter professionals are vital to building a workforce pipeline and providing connections to our students to industry.

We were honored to host Chairman Roger Williams at The WILD last August to showcase these efforts and highlight how federal policy intersects with local innovation.

Student-Run Enterprises: Small Business in Action

Our students do not just study entrepreneurship — they operate businesses. One way Godley ISD has been intentional in providing real-world work experience is by creating student-run enterprises. These internal small businesses provide students with the opportunity to interface with our community through their enterprise and in turn, provide additional services and retail opportunities to our community.

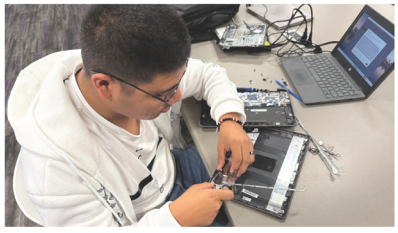
Shop The WILD, our school store, is a fully student-run enterprise where entrepreneurship students manage every aspect of the business while selling apparel and spirit items. Shop The WILD also serves as the point of sale for other programs within the facility like drone students hired to film aerial footage of properties for local real estate agents or welding students building custom projects for community members. Using real data to guide decisions and track trends, students experience the full business cycle—launching products, managing customers, and applying classroom lessons in finance and marketing—while building school pride and career-ready skills in leadership, collaboration, and problem-solving.





Wild Blooms, our floral design shop, opens to the public during high-demand events like Homecoming and Valentine's Day, turning the classroom into a working retail business. Students design custom arrangements, manage orders, set pricing, market products, and provide customer service while working under real deadlines. Through serving authentic customers and generating revenue, students gain hands-on experience in design, budgeting, and operations while building confidence and professional skills.

iLEAD, our Information Technology program, supports and services student technology devices across the district. As a one-to-the-world district with more than 3,000 Chromebooks in students' hands as daily learning tools, device repair is an ongoing and essential need. Through this student-led



enterprise, we were able to bring those repairs in-house—eliminating costly outsourcing fees while providing students with authentic, hands-on experience. Students manage the full repair cycle: intake, troubleshooting, diagnostics, repair, invoicing, and returning devices to their campus. This model saves the district more annually in repair costs than the salary of the teacher who leads the program, while delivering real-world learning experiences that are truly invaluable.

These enterprises teach budgeting, customer service, marketing, compliance, and operational logistics — authentic small business skills that cannot be replicated through simulation alone.

Ways You Can Make an Impact

The House Committee on Small Business on Small Business can play a pivotal role in strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) by aligning federal policy with workforce development and small business growth. Key actions could include:

- Create **tax incentives or direct funding** for small businesses that hire high school interns and/or registered apprentices, helping offset training and supervision costs.
- **Incentives for local and regional economic development organizations** to formally partner with public schools in building workforce-ready talent pipelines that attract new business and industry, specifically to rural, fast-growth communities like Godley, Texas.
- Public school salaries are not competitive with industry salaries making it extremely difficult to recruit highly-qualified teachers with industry experience.
  Designate additional funding that **supplement—not supplant—local salary schedules** to make CTE teacher pay more competitive with industry standards, enabling schools to recruit professionals with real-world experience.
- Prohibit unfunded state and federal mandates on public schools and require states to increase annual K–12 funding at a minimum of a rate equal to or greater than inflation to ensure sustainable program growth and workforce alignment.
- Restrict state actions that reduce or undermine local funding mechanisms—particularly those that limit bonding capacity for fast-growth districts—such as excessive increases to homestead exemptions that erode districts' ability to finance facilities and CTE infrastructure.

Strategic federal action in these areas would strengthen public education while directly supporting small business development and long-term economic competitiveness.

Conclusion

Career and Technical Education is no longer an alternative pathway. It is an essential strategy for economic growth and small business sustainability.

When students graduate with certifications, real-world experience, and professional skills, they strengthen local economies, fill workforce gaps, and, in many cases, become entrepreneurs themselves.

At Godley ISD, we believe education should launch students into opportunity. The WILD is one example of how local school districts, supported by thoughtful state and federal policy, can align education with workforce needs.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to strengthening the connection between education and small business across this nation.

I look forward to answering your questions.

Zach Boren Apprenticeships for America Written Testimony for

The House Committee on Small Business

Full Committee Hearing: "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success"

Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on how we can strengthen America's Main Streets by investing in a well-trained workforce through Career and Technical Education (CTE) — and by ensuring CTE is directly connected to Registered Apprenticeships that allow students and workers to earn while they learn.

My name is Zach Boren, and I serve as Senior Vice President of Apprenticeships for America (AFA), the national industry association advancing apprenticeship as America's first-choice talent strategy. With more than 700 members across industry, government, labor, and education, AFA connects policy to practice — helping employers of all sizes launch and scale high-quality apprenticeships while advancing the infrastructure and funding needed to support the nation's apprenticeship system. Our north star is to reach 4 million active apprentices over the next decade, putting the United States on par with global leaders such as England, Germany, Switzerland, and Australia.

Our nonpartisan leadership has helped advance meaningful state and federal reforms, including Maryland's 2025 RAISE Act — a landmark pay-for-success apprenticeship incentive model. That work, alongside new research and advocacy, has helped drive broader federal momentum, including the U.S. Department of Labor's recent $145 million investment using performance-based funding to expand apprenticeships nationwide.

For over a decade, I served as a civil servant working to grow apprenticeships across multiple administrations — from President George W. Bush through President Trump — at the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. In my final role as Director of Registered Apprenticeship and



Policy, we partnered with the nation's largest unions, industry associations, and leading employers — including Google, Siemens, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Automotive Service Excellence — to scale high-quality apprenticeship programs nationwide. During that time, national apprenticeship participation increased by more than 160 percent, National Apprenticeship Week was launched and now marks its 12th year, veteran access to GI Bill benefits was streamlined, and Federal program startup paperwork was reduced by 70 percent. I also worked closely with State Apprenticeship Agencies across the country, giving me firsthand insight into both what works — and where outdated laws, regulations, and political processes continue to hamper growth and business opportunity. While considerable progress has been made, much more reform is still needed to fully unlock the potential of apprenticeships for American small businesses.

Beyond my Federal service, I have worked directly with small businesses as an apprenticeship intermediary — recruiting employers, designing high-quality programs, and helping companies across IT, energy, automotive, healthcare, and the construction trades launch apprenticeship programs that meet real workforce needs.

But my connection to apprenticeships is also a family story. I grew up in a blue-collar rich family. Our small Indiana town was the kind of place where you knew what people did for a living because you saw it every day outside our houses and in the trucks parked in the driveway. I am the son of a proud apprenticeship graduate. In the 1970s, my dad, Ken Boren, completed a meter technician apprenticeship with Northern Indiana Public Service Company in partnership with the United Steelworkers. That hands-on education didn't just lead to a job — it built a trade that sustained our family and powered our American Dream for more than 50 years.

That is what apprenticeships represent for millions of American families — and what they can mean for employers searching for skilled workers, and for workers seeking stability and opportunity in a rapidly changing labor market.

We are at a pivotal moment for workers and small businesses alike, and a college-for-all strategy alone is no longer enough to meet our hometown

talent needs. Instead, an old idea — earn-and-learn apprenticeships — is experiencing a renaissance and should stand alongside higher education as a core pathway to opportunity. Registered Apprenticeships, a system that has operated for more than 80 years, can — if appropriately invested in — unleash a new wave of talent on Main Street and provide small businesses with the skilled workforce they need to compete and thrive.

CTE is increasingly where that journey begins — giving students hands-on skills and industry exposure — while Registered Apprenticeship is where those skills are transformed into paid training, industry-recognized credentials, and long-term careers.

Registered Apprenticeship — Built for Main Street Employers

Small businesses are the backbone of the American economy — accounting for nearly half of private-sector employment. Yet small employers consistently report that hiring and retaining qualified workers is one of their greatest challenges (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index, 2024). That's what makes apprenticeship such a powerful public-private partnership. It provides small businesses with a structured, industry-driven framework to develop skilled homegrown talent aligned to their real-time needs.

Registered Apprenticeships combine paid, on-the-job training with structured curriculum, allowing workers to earn while they learn. Unlike college students taking on debt, apprentices are paid by their sweat, and the average graduate earns about $80,000 annually –exceeding entry-level bachelor's degree earners. According to the evaluation of the American Apprenticeship Initiative, participants' earnings increased by nearly 50% after completing a registered apprentice program, compared to their prior earnings.

Increasingly, the continuum of work-based learning begins in high school CTE programs and flows directly into Registered Apprenticeships with small businesses. For example, in Central Campus in Des Moines, students now participate in apprenticeships in multiple occupations – earning competitive wages and gaining on-the-job experience while still in high school. This is



exactly the kind of seamless CTE-to-career pathway that expands options for students and strengthens local workforces.

Today, nearly 680,000 Americans are training for jobs through the Registered Apprenticeship system – more enrollment than the nine largest public universities combined – yet apprenticeship receives only a fraction of government funding for education. Just 0.3% of U.S. workers are apprentices, far below our international competitors Germany and England. While Registered Apprenticeships have nearly doubled over the past decade, they remain underutilized relative to their potential.

Meanwhile, Federal policy and funding continue to emphasize a college-for-all approach. For every Federal dollar spent on apprenticeship, roughly $1,000 is spent on higher education. Meanwhile, 45 percent of college graduates are underemployed, and student loan debt has reached a whopping $1.7 trillion—nearly $38,000 per borrower on average. Apprenticeships offer a proven alternative: strong wages, career mobility, and no student debt.

Our nation's overemphasis on college leaves too many behind – one half of Americans won't attend, complete, or have the financial means to start college. Unfortunately, America's decades-long college obsession has left us with skill gaps in the skilled trades and technical jobs that have good pay and don't require a degree. Some projections show that we're short millions of electricians and plumbers. These are high-quality, stable jobs: electricians earn a median of $62,000, and a New York City union plumber can expect to earn six figures. These careers strengthen local economies and support small business growth.

Employers see returns too — apprenticeships generate a 144% return on investment with small businesses experiencing the greatest gains. Registered Apprenticeships deliver higher employee retention compared to all other workforce strategies, and consistently report strong employer satisfaction. Over a lifetime, research shows apprentices earn roughly $300,000 more in wages and benefits than comparable peers. For policymakers, apprenticeships are a net-positive, anti-poverty strategy that reduces

reliance on public assistance, while restoring dignity and purpose through work.

Simply put, apprenticeships are a win for workers, a win for small businesses, and a win for taxpayers.

What Works for Small Businesses: Evidence from the Field

A pilot project I directed — the Small and Medium Business Tech Apprenticeship Project during my time at the Urban Institute — shows exactly how apprenticeships can scale for small businesses when the right supports are in place. We worked with employers across North and South Carolina, many with fewer than 50 employees, to launch and expand tech apprenticeships in fields like software development, IT support, and cybersecurity. Over three years, the project stimulated 275 new apprenticeships and launched a dozen new programs — exceeding expectations for hiring and employer participation.

One example is Technically IT, a small, minority-owned business providing tech services to local companies. Its founder and CEO, Ashley, was drawn to apprenticeships because they allowed her to train local talent while growing her business in a tight labor market. With grant support from Google.org to cover classroom instruction and hands-on technical assistance to design and register the program, she was able to hire apprentices quickly and affordably — saving roughly $20,000 in education costs while expanding her business.

That experience points to the real "secret sauce" for small business apprenticeships: group sponsors and intermediaries that handle program design, compliance, and training coordination, paired with targeted funding that offsets upfront costs. When those supports exist, small businesses don't just participate in apprenticeships — they scale them.

North Carolina: A Proven Model for Small Business Apprenticeship Growth

North Carolina has cracked the code for scaling apprenticeships through a group employer model. Today, more than 25 employer groups (i.e., Group



Apprenticeship Sponsors) are collaborating to jointly operate apprenticeship programs with community colleges and high schools — training workers for roles ranging from mechatronics technicians to accounting and tech.

Group apprenticeship sponsors allow multiple employers to share the cost, administration, and infrastructure of apprenticeship programs. These consortia are typically led by industry associations, community colleges, nonprofits, or labor-management partnerships and are designed to meet the workforce needs of specific industries or entire regions. In North Carolina alone, more than 10 percent of apprentices are now trained through these consortium models across manufacturing, technology, and professional services.

Apprenticeship 2000, a youth apprenticeship program outside Charlotte, has operated and recruited students for more than 30 years. Founded in 1994 by a consortium of Swiss, German, American, and Austrian-based companies, the program allows employers to jointly brand and promote a single, high-quality apprenticeship pathway — much like a respected college brands its degree programs — giving students and families confidence in the rigor, outcomes, and career value of the training.

The program attracts high-performing students who often have college options but choose apprenticeship because of the hands-on experience and direct career pathways it offers. As one apprentice, Jordan Pounds, explained: "I explored my options between going to a four-year university and the apprenticeship program — and the apprenticeship had the most pros." (Urban Institute, 2021)

For Group Sponsor member companies, like Austrian-headquartered Blum, more than 65 percent of its current technicians are graduates of the program — demonstrating the power of apprenticeship to build loyalty, retention, and a skilled workforce pipeline (Urban Institute, 2021). This is what becomes possible when businesses can access apprenticeships through shared, scalable models.

In North Carolina, and across the country, CTE programs at community colleges and high schools are becoming the front door to Registered

Apprenticeship — aligning coursework directly with employer-designed training so students move seamlessly from classroom to paid, on-the-job learning.

Expand and Incentivize Group Apprenticeship Sponsors to Serve Small Businesses

If Congress wants apprenticeships to scale for small businesses, the most immediate and powerful lever is expanding and strengthening group apprenticeship sponsors — partnerships that design programs, recruit employers, manage registration, coordinate training, and support apprentices. The core challenge in growing apprenticeships is not employer interest; it is the lack of a sustainable financing model for the sponsors that perform the high-cost, high-impact work of building and administering programs.

For small businesses especially, these group sponsors can be the difference between wanting to hire apprentices and actually being able to do it. When sponsors absorb regulatory burden, coordinate training, and provide technical assistance, employers can focus on running their business and training workers on the job. States like North Carolina and Iowa have demonstrated that consortium models dramatically increase small business participation while maintaining quality and strong outcomes.

Adopt Pay-for-Performance Incentives That Reward Real Apprenticeship Outcomes

To accelerate apprenticeship growth among small businesses, Congress should adopt Pay-for-Performance incentives that reward verified outcomes — such as apprentice hiring, retention, and successful completion — rather than simply funding activity.

For small employers, the greatest barriers to apprenticeship are not interest or need — they are upfront costs, administrative complexity, and financial risk. Outcome-based funding can directly support group sponsors and apprenticeship intermediaries that recruit small businesses, design programs,

manage compliance, and deliver classroom instruction on their behalf. Instead of asking each small employer to build a program alone, Congress can incentivize shared, scalable models, like those employer consortia in North Carolina, that lower costs and reduce red tape.

This Committee is uniquely positioned to champion it. By authorizing performance-based funding targeted specifically to small business group sponsors — and aligning those incentives with SBA and regional economic development efforts — Congress can ensure public dollars flow only when small businesses hire, train, and retain apprentices.

This model protects taxpayers by paying for results, avoids subsidizing activity that would have occurred anyway, and creates a workforce strategy that small employers can actually access and scale.

Modernize the Apprenticeship System to Reduce Bureaucracy and Speed Employer Participation

The National Apprenticeship Act has not been meaningfully modernized in more than 80 years, and fragmented state processes too often slow employer participation. Excessive and inconsistent registration paperwork — that can exceed 35 pages — delays hiring without improving quality. In some states, apprenticeship councils function as additional bureaucratic layers, creating months-long bottlenecks for small employers ready to train workers.

I have seen this firsthand. In Pennsylvania, as I wrote in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, a small business apprenticeship initiative I helped lead faced significant delays navigating state approval processes. After 10 months and three council meetings, pleading our case, the program was finally approved. The issue was not employer demand or even program quality; it was bureaucratic friction, led by 11 political appointees designed in the state's 1960-era legislation. For small businesses operating on tight margins, delays like these can mean missed contracts, lost candidates, and abandoned apprenticeship plans altogether.



Congress can help modernize this system by establishing clear national approval timelines, standardizing registration paperwork, returning apprenticeship councils to an advisory role, and creating turnkey occupational standards that allow for faster review. These reforms would dramatically reduce friction while preserving program integrity — ensuring the system works for small employers instead of slowing them down.

Align Federal Education Funding for Earn-And-Learn

Outdated funding structures still favor classroom-only education over proven earn-and-learn models. Veterans using the GI Bill, for example, receive far greater support for college than for apprenticeships — despite apprenticeships delivering strong wages, retention, and employer outcomes.

Veteran apprentices, under the Post 9/11 GI Bill receive a shrinking housing allowance and little else, while college students collect full tuition and generous stipends. In DC, that choice can cost a veteran apprentice nearly $200,000 in lost benefits (author's calculation) a clear signal that we still value degrees over the trades.

Modernizing these funding streams to reflect today's labor market would expand veterans' access to Registered Apprenticeship and vocational education while helping small businesses meet critical workforce needs.

Unlock Apprenticeship Growth for America's Small Businesses

At their core, these reforms make apprenticeships practical, accessible, and financially workable for small employers. When a small business is ready to invest in training workers, the Federal government and states should enable that decision — not delay it.

By empowering group sponsors, rewarding companies that hire and retain apprentices, reducing unnecessary regulatory barriers, and aligning educational dollars with real workforce demand, Congress can modernize apprenticeship for today's economy. The result would be a system that works not just for our Fortune 500s, like Boeing and Microsoft, but for the small and



mid-sized companies that power our hometowns, like Technically IT in Augusta, Georgia and Blum in Lowesville, North Carolina.

Apprenticeships are one of the most effective anti-poverty strategies we have. They are a first rung on the ladder to the middle class — where Americans can advance through sweat, not student debt — reducing dependence on public assistance and building stronger families and main streets.

And we won't add to the national deficit to get there—just pragmatic investments in our future, rather than borrowing against it. Few other workforce policies can claim this consistent result across workers, employers, and taxpayers. The evidence is clear: apprenticeships work.



February 24, 2026

The Honorable Roger Williams
Chair
House Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nydia Velázquez
Ranking Member
House Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washinton, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez and Members of the House Committee on Small Business:

On behalf of Associated Builders and Contractors, a national construction industry trade association with 67 chapters and more than 23,000 members, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the committee's hearing, "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success." The majority of ABC's general contractor and subcontractor members qualify as small businesses as defined by the Small Business Administration. The industry consistently has one of the highest concentrations of small business participation, and its members play an integral role in building America's infrastructure.

Small businesses are the backbone of the construction industry. In fact, 81% of all construction firms have fewer than 10 employees while 99% have fewer than 100, underscoring the dominance of small operations across the sector. These firms don't just exist in large numbers—they also drive job creation. Currently, 69% of the construction workforce is employed by companies with fewer than 100 employees, illustrating the central role that small and mid-sized businesses play in sustaining the industry's labor force.

ABC's 67 chapters educate craft, safety and management professionals using innovative and flexible learning models, such as just-in-time task training, competency-based progression and work-based learning. These talent development initiatives occur alongside ABC's more than 450 federal and state government-registered apprenticeship programs that prepare American's nationwide for safe and productive work in more than 20 occupations.

However, at current rates of participation and completion, federal and state GRAPs clearly fail to meet the construction industry's short- and long-term skilled workforce development needs at a time when the industry must attract 349,000 workers in 2026 to meet the demand for construction services.

While ABC members are deeply engaged in apprenticeship programs, training partnerships and on-the-job mentoring, we also strongly support efforts to expand accessible CTE opportunities that allow students, including non-college-bound youth, to move seamlessly from K-12 classrooms into career pathways in infrastructure, construction and the skilled trades. For example, enhanced alignment of secondary CTE programs with industry certifications, investments in modern equipment/training facilities and stronger collaboration among schools, industry and apprenticeship/employer sponsors will yield dividends in workforce readiness.

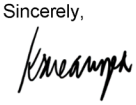
Strengthening CTE is essential to ensuring small businesses, the backbone of the construction industry, can meet the workforce demands of today and tomorrow. As the vast majority of construction firms are small employers responsible for sustaining most of the industry's jobs, policies that expand access to high-quality, industry-aligned CTE programs will directly support Main Street success.

In his own letter to the committee, Kelvin Enfinger of ABC member Greenhut Construction Inc. in Pensacola, Florida, emphasized the importance of CTE programs for preparing students for high-demand careers in construction and infrastructure. “In our region, CTE programs are not an alternative to success, they are a direct pipeline to it,” Enfinger noted. “Many students who may not pursue a traditional four-year college degree can step into meaningful, well-paying careers immediately after graduation. With proper alignment, modern equipment and strong industry partnerships, CTE becomes a launchpad for entrepreneurship and small business growth.”

Brandi Faison, education director of ABC North Florida, is a former teacher with more than 20 years of experience in CTE classrooms who has seen firsthand that strong partnerships between schools and the skilled trades create sustainable pipelines that benefit both students and small businesses. “When industry professionals engage directly with students, they bring real-world expertise, mentorship and hands-on learning opportunities that connect classroom instruction to meaningful careers,” Faison said. “These partnerships expose students to high-demand career pathways, leadership development and entrepreneurship within the trades—allowing them to earn industry credentials, advance professionally and even build their own businesses. By expanding and strengthening these collaborations, and by supporting policies and investments that sustain and modernize CTE programs, we can provide students with clear, achievable pathways to success while meeting the workforce needs of Main Street America—all without placing unnecessary financial debt on the next generation.”

While ABC members continue to make substantial investments in apprenticeship and workforce development, the scale of current labor shortages requires a broader, more coordinated approach. By modernizing CTE programs, fostering stronger partnerships between educators and industry, and creating seamless pathways from classrooms to careers, Congress can help secure a skilled, safe and productive construction workforce that will build and maintain America’s infrastructure for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Kristen Swearingen
Vice President, Government Affairs

GREENHUT
CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, INC.

GENERAL CONTRACTORS • CONSTRUCTION MANAGERS • DESIGN-BUILD CONTRACTORS

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The Honorable Nydia Velázquez
Ranking Member
House Committee on Small Business
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez and Members of the House Committee on Small Business:

I am writing to you to share my story of success from a tradesman to an executive perspective, and to express my strong support for strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) as a pathway to small business growth and workforce development.

I began my career in the construction industry as a skilled tradesman. I worked in the field as a carpenter and equipment operator, learning the craft from the ground up. Over time, through hands-on experience, mentorship, and continued growth, I advanced into leadership and today serve as a Partner and Vice President of Greenhut Construction Company, the oldest and largest commercial construction firm based in Pensacola, Florida.

I am a direct product of hands-on learning and mentorship in skilled trades. I grew up in a construction family, worked in the field, and spent years traveling the country managing complex projects before eventually returning home and growing into an executive leadership role. The construction industry provided not only a career, but a pathway to ownership, leadership, and long-term stability for me and my family.

That pathway must remain open to the next generation.

In Northwest Florida, I have worked closely with local school districts, workforce boards, and industry leaders to strengthen CTE programs that prepare students for high-demand careers in construction and infrastructure. We actively support programs that align high school curriculum with industry-recognized credentials, promote apprenticeship opportunities, and expose students to real-world job sites and mentors.

As the 2025 Chair of ABC of Florida, I saw firsthand how critical it is that state and federal policy supports flexible, industry-aligned training models. Construction is not a one-size-fits-all industry. Small businesses, like most contractors across this country, need workforce solutions that are nimble, competency-based, and connected directly to employer demand.

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Website: www.greenhut.com

In our region, CTE programs are not an alternative to success, they are a direct pipeline to it. Many students who may not pursue a traditional four-year college degree can step into meaningful, well-paying careers immediately after graduation. With proper alignment, modern equipment, and strong industry partnerships, CTE becomes a launchpad for entrepreneurship and small business growth.

The construction industry must attract hundreds of thousands of new workers in the coming years. Small businesses will shoulder much of that responsibility. Expanding and modernizing CTE programs is one of the most practical and impactful steps Congress can take to ensure America's small construction firms have access to the skilled workforce necessary to build our infrastructure, strengthen our communities, and drive economic growth.

I am living proof that when we invest in our youth, support skilled trade education, and provide mentorship, we are not just filling jobs, we are creating leaders, owners, and community builders.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and for your commitment to strengthening America's small businesses.

Respectfully,

Kelvin Enfinger

Kelvin Enfinger
Vice President & Partner
Greenhut Construction Company, Inc.
2025 Chair, ABC of Florida

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The Honorable Nydia Velázquez
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House Committee on Small Business
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Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Willaims and Ranking Member Velázquez,

The National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) strongly supports legislative efforts to strengthen Career and Technical Education, which is a critical tool for addressing workforce development needs within the roofing industry. NRCA wishes to comment regarding the hearing titled "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success" to review stakeholder input, and requests this letter be included in the official hearing record.

Established in 1886, NRCA is one of the nation's oldest trade associations and the voice of roofing professionals worldwide. Our nearly 4,000 member companies represent all segments of the industry, including contractors, manufacturers, distributors, consultants, and other employers in all 50 states and internationally. NRCA members are typically small, privately held companies with the average member employing 45 people and attaining sales of $4.5 million per year. The U.S. roofing industry is an essential $100 billion sector with nearly one million employees that provides critical materials and services to ensure home and business safety.

Chronic workforce shortages continue to be the top challenge facing roofing industry employers, including our contractor and manufacturer members, as an aging workforce and other demographic trends make it more difficult to find qualified candidates for well-paying, family-sustaining jobs. Greater investment in CTE is essential to providing the strategies and tools needed to help employers address expanding workforce needs. CTE provides access to opportunities for students who want to develop skills, increase their knowledge and contribute to their communities by pursuing a rewarding career.

NRCA was pleased to support enactment of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act in 2018, legislation that expanded and improved CTE under the Perkins Act, which governs programs in all 50 states and territories. We commend Rep. Glenn Thompson for his leadership on this landmark legislation that was enacted with broad, bipartisan support. The law has provided for more effective collaboration between employers and educational institutions in the design and implementation of CTE programs.

Following enactment of this legislation several years ago, it comes as no surprise there are positive signs of growing interest in CTE around the country. For example, the National Student Clearinghouse has indicated there was a 16% increase in trade school enrollment in 2024 and

another 11.7% in the spring of 2025, both record highs since the organization began collecting data of this nature in 2018.

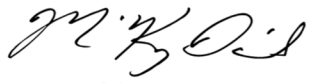
As a result, it will be critical for trade schools to obtain continued legislative support and increased funding from Congress to keep up with growing demand and help employers meet their workforce needs, especially in an era of rapid technological change. An estimated 75% of the funding for CTE programs comes from public sources at the federal, state and local level. However, in recent years, appropriations for CTE have not kept pace with inflation and growing demand despite the importance of these programs to sustaining economic growth. Moreover, over the past few decades, federal policies that support college bound students have been funded at far greater levels compared to support for CTE, leading to fewer students going into the trades. This lack of support is one of the primary reasons that a disproportionate number of jobs open today are for skilled tradespeople.

NRCA strongly urges Congress to give higher priority to investments in CTE in the future. This includes increased funding for Perkins State Grants, which provide funding for CTE programs operated at the state and local levels. This funding is critical to high schools, community colleges, small businesses and the students who need training to help close the skills gap in today's workforce.

Finally, as Congress considers potential legislation to further improve and reauthorize the Perkins Act, NRCA looks forward to working with lawmakers on how best to strengthen CTE to meet the demands of the roofing industry and broader U.S. economy in the years to come.

Thank you for your consideration of NRCA's views on this important issue. If you have questions please contact Brad Stine in our Washington, DC office at bstine@nrca.net.

Sincerely,



McKay Daniels
Chief Executive Officer

CENTRAL MIDWEST REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS
IKORCC JATF

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Neal Strange
Director of Education

711 Greenwood Springs Dr.
Greenwood, IN 46143

Dear Chairman Williams and Ranking Member Velázquez,

On behalf of the Central Midwest Regional Council of Carpenters (CMRCC) and the Indiana-Kentucky-Ohio Joint Apprenticeship Training Fund (IKORCC JATF), thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective on the critical role Registered Apprenticeships play in developing a highly skilled construction workforce. The CMRCC and IKORCC JATF support more than 300 contractors and over 38,500 union members across Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. Our mission is to ensure that contractors have access to the most qualified workers in the industry and that our members have access to long-term, high-wage careers.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP: A PROVEN WORKFORCE MODEL

Our apprenticeship programs follow the U.S. Department of Labor's Standards of Apprenticeship—the gold standard for work-based learning. These standards ensure:

- Strong employer involvement
- High-quality related technical instruction
- Structured on-the-job learning with skilled mentors
- Progressive wage increases tied to skill attainment
- Two nationally recognized credentials upon completion
  - A DOL Certificate of Completion
  - An Associate of Applied Science degree in Apprenticeship Technology

We offer three primary four-year apprenticeship programs—Carpentry, Millwright, and Floor Covering—focused on industrial and commercial construction. Apprentices attend one week of training each quarter at one of our state-of-the-art training centers. Courses are taught by journey-level instructors trained at the United Brotherhood of Carpenters' International Training Center in Las Vegas. Approximately 20% of instruction is classroom-based, with the remaining 80% spent in hands-on shop training.

Outside the classroom, apprentices work year-round for signatory contractors, earning strong wages while applying and refining their skills under the guidance of experienced journey-workers.

CENTRAL MIDWEST REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS
IKORCC JATF

SAFETY AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Safety is foundational to every aspect of our training. Every course includes a safety component, and our training centers continually update offerings to reflect emerging technologies and evolving industry needs. All training—whether for apprentices or long-standing members—is provided at no cost to the individual. Contractors recognize the value of this rigor and invest in our members through wages that exceed typical construction pay.

BARRIERS TO SUPPLYING A SKILLED WORKFORCE

Despite strong demand for skilled labor—billions of dollars in construction projects across our three states—several barriers limit our ability to meet workforce needs.

1. CONSTRUCTION TAX FRAUD

Unscrupulous contractors who misclassify workers or pay them off the books undermine legitimate employers and weaken the industry. These practices:

- Allow bad actors to underbid responsible contractors
- Reduce opportunities for Registered Apprentices
- Harm communities through lost tax revenue

It is estimated that construction tax fraud costs taxpayers over $10 billion annually across the U.S. Increased enforcement would help level the playing field and strengthen the workforce pipeline.

2. MISUSE OF THE TERM "APPRENTICESHIP"

In recent years, programs labeled as "apprenticeships" have proliferated, many lacking the rigor, safety standards, mentorship, wage progression, and credentialing required under federal Registered Apprenticeship regulations. This creates confusion for students, parents, educators, and employers, and dilutes the meaning of a true apprenticeship.

The term **"apprenticeship" should be reserved exclusively for programs meeting U.S. DOL standards**, as defined in Title 29 CFR Parts 29 & 30.

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IKORCC JATF

3. HIGH SCHOOL WORK-BASED LEARNING MISALIGNMENT

We appreciate the Department of Education's interest in expanding work-based learning, but placing high school students directly into Registered Apprenticeships is not appropriate for industrial and commercial construction:

- **Sixteen-year-olds are still exploring career options** and may not be ready to commit to a four-year apprenticeship.
- **Construction sites pose safety risks** that are not suitable for minors.
- **Contractors lack the capacity** to provide the level of mentorship required for youth in these environments.

A BETTER PATH FORWARD: CERTIFIED PRE-APPRENTICESHIPS

Rather than creating new, untested models, federal initiatives should support **certified pre-apprenticeship programs** that align directly with Registered Apprenticeships. Federal investment in these programs would:

- Provide students with safe, structured, hands-on learning
- Prepare them with foundational skills before entering a jobsite
- Support contractors with resources to train mentors and manage youth safely
- Strengthen and expand the Registered Apprenticeship pipeline

CONCLUSION

The CMRCC and IKORCC JATF strongly believe that expanding and protecting Registered Apprenticeship pathways is essential to building a safe, skilled, and sustainable construction workforce. We respectfully ask that you consider the recommendations outlined in this letter and welcome further discussion on these important issues.

Sincerely,

Neal A. Strange

Neal Strange
Director of Education

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Statement for the Record
Congresswoman Lateefah Simon (CA-12)
House Committee on Small Business
"Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success"
Tuesday February 24, 2026

Thank you, Chair Williams and Ranking Member Velazquez. And thank you to the witnesses for testifying here today.

I agree with much of what my colleagues have said: workforce development and career and technical education matter.

But I also want to take a step back. Because if we're serious about solving the workforce crisis facing small businesses, we must be honest about what's driving it.

The problem isn't all just a skills gap. It's a support gap.

Working Americans, especially working-class Black and brown Americans, people with disabilities, and young people, are being asked to build careers without the foundation they need to stand on.

The full picture includes access to healthcare, housing, fair wages, pensions, and food. Are we making it possible for folks to say yes to opportunities with small businesses?

Expanding apprenticeship programs and career and technical education is certainly critical.

But small businesses are also being squeezed out of the talent pipeline, not because they aren't good employers, but because they cannot compete with the benefits and wages that large corporations can offer.

That's a structural problem, and it demands a structural response.

I want to share something from my own district that I think shows us what the solution can look like.

Last week, I visited the Fruitvale neighborhood in Oakland, and a non-profit called the Unity Council gave me a tour.

The Unity Council has a simple mission: to improve quality of life by building vibrant communities where everyone can work, learn, and thrive.

They do it all: affordable housing, career services, mentorship and job training, Head Start programs, and dedicated support for small and minority-owned businesses.

They don't just aim to support and train workers; they build up the whole community around them.

Youth Uprising and the East Oakland Youth Development Center are also in my district, doing the same - meeting young people where they are at and investing in their futures.

At the federal level, the Treasure Island Job Corps in the Bay Area offers vocational and academic training, but also housing, meals, basic health care, a living allowance, and career transition assistance.

So, it was deeply troubling to me when the Trump Administration tried to kill the Job Corps last year by suspending all operations.

The organizations I mentioned understand something we should take to heart: you cannot separate workforce development from community development.

You cannot train someone for a job and ignore whether they can afford rent, whether they have healthcare, whether they feel safe and seen.

So, let's talk about how to help small businesses compete and grow, but let's not do it with blinders on.

The workers we're talking about today deserve more than a pipeline. They deserve a foundation. And it's our job to help build it.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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Edward J. Devine IV, *Business Manager/Financial Secretary*
Steve Peters, *President*

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February 19, 2026

Dear Chairman Williams and Ranking Member Valazquez:

Registered Apprenticeship programs are the lifeblood of the Building Trade Industries. They provide a mechanism for growing our Craft and at the same time give us the ability to be competitive by creating composite rates by using a mix of Journeyman level workers and apprentices. By using the mixed ratio our contractors have an ability to keep cost low for the customer for which they are providing a service.

It also enables us to project manpower needs for the future. Members who are retiring and anticipated workloads/projects, as those increase we can use the apprenticeship model to fill the gaps and meet those needs and demands of our Industries. Pull back when there is not such a need and increase memberships when we know there will be a need. The problem we have now is meeting all the demand that is out there for the skilled trades. This has been one problem that many Unions with apprenticeships have wrestled with over recent years, Timing. Our apprenticeships have to have the opportunities(JOBS) in order for this model to work. This is one area where Congress could help. Any Projects with Federal or State Funding on those projects, the Govt. could require, put into law (Strengthen Davis Bacon) that those contractors participate in a registered apprenticeship program through the state and the USDOL. This in turn would create more opportunities for us to utilize the apprenticeship model.

Registered Apprenticeship programs are designed to provide a set number of classroom hours as well as hands-on, for instance IBEW apprentices need 8000 **on-the-job training (OJT) hours** as well as 752 classroom hours. There

is no cost to the apprentices selected for our programs. Apprenticeship is an "Earn While You Learn" program and apprentices are paid when they are working on the job and in the classroom. Our apprenticeships have structured pay scales that increase as they advance both hands-on training (OJT) and in the classroom.

Our apprenticeship programs are fully self-funded by our members and our contractors and jointly controlled by a board of trustees made up of management and the union representatives. Many of our apprenticeships have shifted back to a four-year model to be more in line with traditional postsecondary institutions. Apprentices earn a nationally recognized and portable certificate of completion and are also able to get an associate degree in applied science.

The Kentucky building trades have a unique partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education that directly supports our program. The Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in KY (TRACK) pre-apprenticeship program enables high school students in related career pathways to gain direct entry into our apprenticeship after graduation. Furthermore, legislation was changed in 2018 to allow the Kentucky Education Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES) funds, that students earn while in high school, to be utilized for Registered Apprenticeship, instead of just colleges and universities. Apprentices are reimbursed for items that support their training such as tools, equipment, uniforms/clothing and travel.

Registered Apprenticeship is a proven and effective approach to training a workforce that the union building trades have been successfully utilizing for decades.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Devine IV
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