



STRENGTHENING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

BACKGROUND: Americans face a job market that is vastly different from the one that existed a generation ago. Advances in technology and the growth of a global economy have dramatically changed the kinds of jobs that are available, making high-quality education and skills development vital to competing in today's workplaces. In recent years, Congress has enacted reforms to improve K-12 education and modernize the nation's workforce development system. However, more must be done to help all Americans access the education they need to earn a lifetime of success.

Since 1984, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act has provided federal support to state and local career and technical education, or CTE, programs. These programs offer students the knowledge, skills, and hands-on experience necessary to compete for jobs in a broad range of fields, such as health care and technology. One CTE graduate, Paul Tse, testified that CTE helped him advance from a struggling high school student to a project manager at a mechanical contracting company, saying: "I am the American Dream." Unfortunately, not all students have had the same success, particularly in the wake of the recent recession.

Because federal law has not been updated in more than a decade, it no longer reflects the realities and challenges facing students and workers. Current policies restrict the ability of state leaders to invest federal resources in efforts that prioritize economic growth and local needs. This occurs at a time when critical industries have vacant jobs but not enough qualified workers to fill them.

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Building on recent reforms to K-12 education and the workforce development system, Reps. Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA) and Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL) introduced the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act. The bipartisan legislation will help more Americans — especially young Americans — enter the workforce with the knowledge and skills they need to compete for good-paying, in-demand jobs in industries critical to the nation's economy. The bill:

- ✓ **Empowers state and local community leaders** by simplifying the application process for receiving federal funds and providing more flexibility to use federal resources to respond to changing education and economic needs.
- ✓ **Improves alignment with in-demand jobs** by supporting innovative learning opportunities, building better community partnerships, and encouraging stronger engagement with employers.
- ✓ **Increases transparency and accountability** by streamlining performance measures to ensure CTE programs deliver results, empowering parents, students, and stakeholders with a voice in setting performance goals and evaluating the effectiveness of local programs.
- ✓ **Ensures a limited federal role** by reining in the secretary of education's authority, limiting federal intervention, and preventing political favoritism.