



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Kennedy Unveils Proposal to Bridge Skills Gap, Prepare Workers for Jobs in New Economy

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ECC, Ford, UAW join Kennedy to highlight new plan to develop skilled workforce and foster “matchmaking for manufacturing”

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy unveiled a new proposal to help bridge the “skills gap” and prepare workers for jobs in our ever-evolving economy at a press conference Tuesday at Erie Community College’s City Campus. Officials from ECC and Ford Motor Company joined Kennedy, as he outlined his proposed plan to establish Centers of Workforce Achievement – which will partner community colleges with local employers to develop a skilled workforce for growth industries within the regional economy.

Developing a Center of Workforce Achievement at ECC would help address a persistent trend that has been observed in Western New York and across the nation – several businesses have job openings going unfilled every month because they can’t find qualified candidates with the necessary skills. In addition, students who enter this new program would significantly boost the likelihood that a job is waiting for them upon graduation.

“Each month, it’s estimated at least 1000 local jobs go unfilled, even though many Western New Yorkers are out looking for jobs every day. Action is needed to bridge this gap. Our Centers of Workforce Achievement plan aims to provide high-wage jobs for graduates and highly-trained workers to help grow local companies,” said **Senator Kennedy**. “Under this new program, community colleges and local

businesses will work in collaboration to develop a skilled workforce to match the needs of our regional economy. ECC, Ford and others have identified an urgent need to prepare local workers for advanced manufacturing. This new public-private partnership program will help Western New Yorkers get the skills needed to secure good-paying jobs.”

At the end of May, more than 3.6 million job openings were unfilled nationwide. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate stood at 8.2 percent. That means there were 3.5 unemployed persons per job opening, according to the Bureau for Labor Statistics.

“Western New York has a long legacy of hard work,” Kennedy added. “By strengthening the pipeline from community colleges to the private sector, we will build upon our history of hard work and boost local economic recovery.”

“Senator Kennedy’s proposed Workforce Achievement Centers, under the auspices of the SUNY Board of Trustees, will further foster the existing and future collaborations ECC has with private industry to create a skilled workforce to meet the needs of the regional and local community,” said **Richard Washousky, ECC's Executive VP of Academic Affairs**. “This college takes great pride in its Western New York-leading workforce development, and we're always looking for ways to get better.”

“Ford is committed to employing Western New Yorkers. Senator Kennedy’s Centers of Workforce Achievement plan would be a critical boost to our efforts to ensure a highly trained workforce at our Buffalo Stamping Plant,” said **Jeff Croff, human resources manager at Ford’s Buffalo Stamping Plant**. “As technology advances and evolves, we’ve noticed a great need for new skills training not just for new hires, but for many of our long-tenured employees. This new proposal would help keep workers up-to-speed with the rapidly changing machinery used in our plant, and it will allow us to retain jobs and encourage more job creation.”

“Every day, we go to work to produce parts that make great vehicles for Western New Yorkers at the Ford Stamping Plant. Over the last few years, the machinery at the plant has been transforming at a rapid pace,” said **Patrick Radtke, UAW president for Ford’s Buffalo Stamping Plant**. “Our commitment to hard work will never change, but the work we do is always changing. Senator Kennedy understands that we need to keep people working and help young workers find jobs. That’s why his Center of Workforce Achievement plan makes sense. It will keep

Western New Yorkers working because their skills are keeping pace with technology.”

Essentially, Kennedy’s proposal would build collaborative public-private partnerships between community colleges and top local employers to design necessary curriculum to ensure students can find local jobs when they graduate.

New York State needs to take on the pressing challenge of educating and training its workforce to meet the demands of a new and changing economic landscape. As technologies and industries evolve, our education system must also evolve to create a workforce that is equipped with the skills to fill these new jobs. Many community colleges, especially ECC, have already started working to form public-private partnerships with local manufacturing and technology businesses in order to address the gap between the jobs available and the skills possessed by the local workforce.

The Centers of Workforce Achievement initiative will advance the creation of these highly productive partnerships and ensure an even higher degree of collaboration between community colleges and private businesses. These Centers will foster an intense focus on the regional needs of existing businesses, and by training workers to fit these needs, they will help keep and create jobs in New York State.

The Centers of Workforce Achievement will function similar to SUNY Centers of Excellence in terms of legislative approval and oversight. This bill also establishes a funding stream to support the development of the Centers. Partnerships entered into by community colleges and private businesses will help ensure that students are fully prepared to find jobs upon graduation.

To read Senator Kennedy's proposed legislation, visit:

<http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/bill/S7669-2011>.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate’s 58th District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, Eden, Hamburg and West Seneca, the city of Lackawanna and parts of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.