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Minnick authors major job-training bill

Wins support from diverse coalition of business, labor, education

Washington, D.C. – In these tough times, more and more workers are going back to school to acquire skills and prepare for the new economic future. Congressman Walt Minnick today is announcing a new initiative to help those workers not only receive training, but also make sure their education is maximally useful in becoming certified for a new career.

“American workers are the best in the world,” said Minnick, a lifelong businessman and entrepreneur who ran a \$700 million company. “They are resilient, innovative and hardworking, as is made so clear by the success of many great companies in my home state of Idaho. We need to make sure that those American workers, many of whom are retraining, are given every opportunity to achieve certifications, degrees and qualifications for the jobs American industry needs to fill.”

Minnick’s bill, H.R. 4072, is titled the American Manufacturing Efficiency and Retraining Investment Collaboration (AMERICA) Works Act. Minnick is the sponsor of the bill, which is being cosponsored by Congressman Frank Kratovil, of Maryland, Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson, of Illinois, and Congressman Bobby Bright, of Alabama.

Minnick has spent nearly eight months crafting the bill, seeking input and support from a diverse coalition, including leaders in manufacturing, business, labor and education.

“The AMERICA Works Act directs critical federal resources toward helping students develop the skills necessary to compete in the workplace,” said Priscilla Bell, president of North Idaho College. “The legislation directs federal financial assistance for programs supported by the Workforce Investment Act, Trade Adjustment Act and Perkins Act toward education and training that ensure students get the skills needed to obtain good jobs. **At North Idaho College, and at community colleges across the nation, the AMERICA Works Act will strengthen the cooperation we have with our business and industry partners.**”

“In tough economic times with high unemployment and the loss of jobs, it is difficult to focus on workforce-skills development. In reality, we have no better time,” said Emily DeRocco, senior vice president at the National Association of Manufacturers. “True economic reform means not only righting our economic ship, but also pursuing the strategies that will ensure we maintain our manufacturing competitiveness and provide the best possible pathways to employment in high-quality, middle-class jobs for all workers. **We commend Congressman Minnick and his colleagues for introducing this bill, which will help ensure both new and transitioning workers have the education and skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century manufacturing economy.**

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“The AMERICA Works Act provides critical resources to vocational and technical education at a time when many Americans are searching for the skills that will provide them and their families with high-wage careers,” said John Littel, a senior executive with the Northwest Carpenters. “The AMERICA Works Act also recognizes the importance of industry partnerships, such as apprenticeships, that provide workers with transferable, industry-recognized certifications.”

In a letter to his colleagues, Minnick wrote that the billions of dollars invested each year in workforce training must be spent effectively. As employers, particularly those in manufacturing, continue to report skills gaps, it has become clear that there should be a more focused approach to ensure workers and employers meet their common goals.

“We must do a better job of aligning education and job training to the career pathways available in the 21st century economy,” the letter states. “The best way to prepare today’s students for the reality of the modern workforce is to offer training in industry-recognized skills.”

Key Points on the AMERICA Works Act:

- The Act directs use of public funds for designated programs in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act, Trade Adjustment Assistance and Workforce Investment Act to develop necessary skills.
- It amends the Perkins Act by assuring programs of study that receive federal funds result in nationally portable, industry-recognized credentials within the career and technical education section of the bill.
- It adds a provision to improve training programs under TAA, established by the Trade Act of 1974, directing the Secretary of Labor to approve programs that provide a nationally portable, industry-recognized credential.
- It amends the Training Activities and Youth Activities sections of WIA to give priority to training programs resulting in nationally portable, industry-recognized credentials.
- It brings local manufacturers in closer contact with local training programs and builds the credibility of publicly funded training programs with employers all over the country.

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