

# We Still Need Career And Technical Education - Even With 3.7% Unemployment

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The American economy added 134,000 jobs in September, according to the [US Department of Commerce](#). The unemployment rate sits at 3.7% - the lowest since 1969. On the other hand, earlier this week [Verizon announced 44,000 layoffs](#) to its global workforce, including a significant portion in the United States, and the outsourcing of 2,500-5,000 jobs to external contractors.

This is the American story in 2018. Rapid growth and incredible bull markets juxtaposed with deep-seated fear among the middle and working classes about job security, wage growth, and our economic future.

In this election year, there has been some discussion about income inequality and economic opportunity – but not nearly enough. Politicians from both parties understand that creating economic opportunity for all requires a long-term strategy that is complicated and difficult to execute. It also requires the alignment of resources, agendas and values among leaders, funders and policy makers.

In August, the United States Congress did *part* of their job. Under the leadership of Congressman [Raja Krishnamoorthi \(D-IL\)](#) and Glenn Thompson (R-PA) in the House of Representatives, and Senators Robert Casey (D-PA) and Mike Enzi (R-WY) in the Senate, the Congress passed a bipartisan overhaul of the [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#). President Trump has previously identified career and technical education as key to restoring rural competitiveness in America.

I recently spoke with Rep. Krishnamoorthi to congratulate him on this achievement. The Congressman, who represents suburban Chicago, has labored for nearly 1.5 years to make this legislation a reality. In an era of unprecedented partisanship, Representative Krishnamoorthi and his colleagues were able to pass legislation through both chambers and keep the support of the President and US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. It passed five unanimous votes in the US House of Representatives and may be the only bipartisan legislation of its kind in 2018. It's a tremendous accomplishment for all four sponsors and their supporters.

Representative Krishnamoorthi emphasized that this is part of a multi-year transformation of our career and technical training programs. The first step was simply to reauthorize this important legislation that authorizes and funds our career and training education programs. These programs are often the first option for young people who do not attend college, for mid-career American workers who need additional training or have been laid-off and need to transition to a new industry. While it's true that our unemployment rate is low, it's also true that several million

jobs remain unfilled in the United States because of a lack of qualified applicants. This legislation is part of the solution to that problem.

Representative Krishnamoorthi is committed to working on this problem in the next session of Congress if he can. He has been thinking about the impact of innovation, technology and the global economy on the American worker, and how it will be important to mobilize partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors to improve CTE programs and to think about CTE more strategically as a national security challenge facing the United States.

Innovation and rapidly scaling startups are having a profound effect on job training in America. Innovation is moving too fast for traditional career training programs to address. The job category of data scientist barely existed a decade ago, and yet today, in the age of analytics, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence, data scientist has become one of the biggest categories of job growth.

America's CTE programs, community colleges and universities must find ways to quickly develop a workforce that reflects these new opportunities. While technology will always move faster than our education system, we must do what we can do bridge the gap. We must leverage the private sector's knowledge of trends and technologies to proactively plan for the workforce of the near-term and long-term. And we must figure out how to teach agility and critical thinking skills in addition to technical ones. Representative Krishnamoorthi and his colleagues have done a good job to keep Congress moving on these issues.