

IN RECOGNITION OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL LISA L.A. EPPERSON

(Mr. BACON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BACON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Lieutenant Colonel Lisa L.A. Epperson on the occasion of her retirement from the United States Air Force, the best Air Force in the world.

Colonel Epperson has given a great deal to this Nation through her service. Her assignments include Wright-Patterson, Tyndall, Los Angeles, Hill, and Nellis Air Force Bases, and finally here at the Pentagon. Colonel Epperson has influenced mission systems from Defense Satellite Communications System and Minuteman III, an ICBM, to the F-15 and F-22. Most importantly, she impacted our warfighting operations in Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

Throughout her distinguished career, Colonel Epperson represented our country with honor, and I am privileged to pay tribute to her. On behalf of Congress and the United States, I want to thank Colonel Epperson; her husband, David; and their children, Trevor and Cassidy, for their 20 years of service. I wish them Godspeed and continued happiness as they start this new chapter.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SMUCKER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the topic of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, tonight I am honored to lead a bipartisan Special Order on career and technical education. We have several Members joining us here this evening to highlight CTE programs in their districts and the upcoming reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

I would like to start the order by yielding to my colleague and colead, Congressman KRISHNAMOORTHI, who has been working hard with my Pennsylvania colleague, Congressman THOMPSON, on H.R. 2353, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative SMUCKER for yielding. I really appreciate his leadership. I thank Congress-

man G.T. THOMPSON from Pennsylvania as well for his leadership. It is an honor to be here.

Madam Speaker, in recent years, global economic trends have led to an ever-growing skills gap. While unemployment has fallen to 4.4 percent in my home State of Illinois, there is still a widening gap between the jobs that are open and the skills workers need. This has become apparent as I have traveled throughout my district listening to community representatives, businesses, parents, students, and higher education officials discuss the local state of the economy.

I have been particularly concerned with the feedback I have received from businesses, who continue to report that there is a gap between the talent and skills they need in employees and what they can actually find. Shortages in skilled fields like machinists, technicians, operators, cybersecurity, and healthcare are impairing their ability to grow their businesses.

There is much Congress can do to improve the skills of our labor force, which is why I was proud to partner with my good friend and fellow member of the Education and the Workforce Committee, Congressman G.T. THOMPSON, in introducing H.R. 2353.

Our bill reauthorizes the Carl D. Perkins grant program through fiscal year 2023 and gives States and local governments the tools to better equip workers for higher paying middle class jobs in the 21st century.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act addresses one of the underlying causes of the skills gap: what is being taught in classes does not necessarily sync up with what is needed to get a job. H.R. 2353 requires a strong buy-in from local businesses in developing State plans.

With more local stakeholders involved in the process, it will better equip students with the technical skills they need to find success in local in-demand careers.

Finally, I believe it is important that we start to shift the culture surrounding career and technical education. Every student, no matter his or her career goals, should participate in some form of career education. I believe that every student needs to graduate, not just with a diploma but with another piece of paper, namely an offer letter.

Some students will find success in a traditional 4-year college program; others, however, will learn the skills they need through a 2-year community college or on-the-job training.

I look forward to working with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to ensure its passage, and I look forward to sending this bill to the President later this year for signing.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank Congressman KRISHNAMOORTHI for his leadership on this issue. The Congressman is a fellow member of the freshman class. I really

appreciate the opportunity to work with him, particularly on this very important topic.

Madam Speaker, I yield to Congressman THOMPSON, the sponsor of H.R. 2353, who, for many years, has been leading the charge here in the House to strengthen career technical education.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I thank my good friend from Pennsylvania, Representative SMUCKER—he is doing a great job representing his congressional district and being a strong voice for Pennsylvania—for hosting this important Special Order tonight focused on career and technical education.

I appreciate my good friend, Representative KRISHNAMOORTHI, who is with me and is leading the charge with the piece of legislation that I hope we will see on the House floor in the weeks to come.

As co-chair of the House Career and Technical Education Caucus, I often say that a high quality career in technical education can help restore rungs on the ladder of opportunity. Now, this statement is one I truly believe in.

For many Americans, those rungs have been displaced for different reasons, whether it is training that they have had, access to training, access to quality, effective training; whether it has been poverty; whether it has been unemployment, underemployment, all things that take away rungs on the ladder of opportunity, this career and technical education can truly restore rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

It is undeniable that career and technological education has helped many Americans obtain the knowledge and skills they need to break the cycle of poverty and achieve a lifetime of success.

The first step to increasing access to CTE programs, as we refer to them, across the United States is modernizing the Federal investment in these programs, and it has been more than a decade since Congress has updated the Federal law governing CTE programs. This is problematic, due to the fact that so much about our society and our Nation's workforce has changed during this time. Since the last time the Perkins Act was reauthorized, we have new skill sets, new jobs, new industry, new opportunities, new technology.

So, for example, today, more than 1 million positions remain open in the trade, transportation, utility sectors, and an additional 315,000 manufacturing positions are currently unfilled. If we are to embark on a new era of American manufacturing and improved infrastructure, we need a qualified and well trained workforce to fill these positions. That is the number one asset of any business. It is not the location; it is not the compliance; it is not the marketing. It really is a qualified and trained workforce.

With all this in mind, I have worked with my colleagues in introducing the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act

once again this Congress. Last Congress, this bill did pass unanimously out of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and was widely supported on the House floor by a vote of 405-5. Unfortunately, things bogged down in the Senate, with a lot of good legislation at the end of the last congressional cycle, and so here we are again, which is okay, because we have taken the opportunity to make this just a little bit better, too. We had some small refinements, but some improvements. We used our time effectively.

Now, this robust reauthorization of the Perkins Act will help ensure that Federal policies accurately reflect the challenges and realities facing today's students, workers, and employers. Additionally, the bill supports innovative learning opportunities and stronger engagements with employers. By promoting work-based learning at the Federal level, more employers will build relationships with students through hands-on experience. This type of learning is invaluable to students with a wide range of interests and learning styles.

I am proud to see this bill pass out of the committee unanimously once again last month. I am looking forward to its consideration on the House floor and in the Senate in the future.

Now, if we are serious about improving our Nation's workforce and providing greater opportunities for all Americans, we will work together to move this bill through the legislative process. After all, this new bill, as I have said before, does restore rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

The impact of increasing access and quality of career and technical education is far-reaching. Take, for example, maybe a 15-year-old girl who when in school was uninspired, her head is on her desk. She doesn't learn in the typical way that many of us do, where people talk at you and teach, but if you can put something in her hands, the tools of career and technical education, that could be a welder, a set of wrenches, it could be a paint brush, it could be a stethoscope, farm implements, she is inspired, and she does great, she excels.

I just heard about a young boy today, who is a young man now, but as a young boy was on the spectrum scale, he had some issues of autism. I was so inspired to hear this today. This young man went into career and technical education as a welder. And today, he is making a significant amount of money, more than what his teacher was making, right out of high school, as a welder because of what career and technical education did.

The young couple facing unemployment and underemployment who is at the kitchen table trying to decide how to make ends meet, and this is an opportunity to get back into the workforce. The middle-aged worker who has been working the line manufacturing who would like a promotion, do a little better by his family, bring more money

home, it provides and serves that person. The family who is stuck in poverty maybe for generations, stuck in poverty so long, they don't even remember what was the incident that put them into poverty generations ago, but this is a way to break that cycle of poverty.

And certainly the successful business owner, who is doing all the right things, and she is invested in her business and has grown the business and has a great product and a great location and a great marketing plan, great compliance plan, because of regulation issues, but she is closing her business, because, Madam Speaker, she can't find qualified and trained workers to keep that business going, let alone grow it. These are all examples of folks who will benefit from this.

I really want to thank my colleagues for their enthusiastic support of career and technical education. On a day when I know there are other places where there are pressures to be this evening, you are right here on the House floor and leading the cause for career and technical education, and I am very thankful for that. Once again, thanks to Representative SMUCKER for his leadership and tonight's Special Order.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I would like to again thank the Congressman for his leadership on this very important issue. I very much enjoyed, in the 5 months I have been here, working with Congressman THOMPSON, a fellow member of the Pennsylvania delegation, but I have seen his passion for this issue. So, again, I look forward to continuing to work with you on this and really appreciate your leadership.

□ 1715

You mentioned the critical need of businesses to fill spots that are available today. We see the unemployment rate today. We know this is a problem today and will continue to be a problem.

My background is in construction. We owned a construction firm. We had about 150 employees. Our biggest problem always was finding qualified people to fill the spots that are available. At the same time, I saw the opportunities that were available to people who decided to take up a career in construction. It is not, as many people think, neither construction nor manufacturing nor many jobs that require technical trade skills today. Construction uses technology, and it is not a dirty job that people once thought it was. The manufacturing is the same way. At the same time, there are great-paying jobs, family-sustaining jobs available in these fields.

I think we need to do a better job of enlightening, essentially, the opportunities and talking about the opportunities that are available through career and technical education.

To your point again, Congressman, there is no better way to help people

out of poverty than to connect them with a good-paying job and the self-worth that is achieved from finding a job. We know those jobs are available today. What career and technical education does is prepare people for great-paying jobs that are available.

Again, thank you so much for your leadership on this.

Now I would like to yield to another freshman colleague of mine on the Education and Workforce Committee, Mr. MITCHELL, who has an extensive background in higher education and brings that expertise to the committee.

Mr. MITCHELL. I thank Mr. SMUCKER for yielding to me.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to talk about education and workforce preparedness.

Prior to serving in Congress, I dedicated my 35-year career to workforce education, helping people develop skills necessary to get a job and start a career path.

There is something about the pride that comes when someone builds the skills necessary to start a career. Their whole world changes when they see what they can achieve and the difference that makes for their family.

I ran for Congress with the desire to make that opportunity possible for all Americans; to help all Americans succeed, as I and so many others in this Chamber have.

For some people, pursuing their desired career means a 4-year college degree. I have also seen that that is not the right path for many others. Yet, too often, those that wish to pursue careers in technical areas lack the skills to gain the employment and access the skills training necessary to move forward.

This leads to a problem we have all heard of, the skills gap. People, young and mature, are unable to find jobs because they lack the necessary skills, and employers are unable to find qualified staff to fill their jobs.

We are seeing this repeatedly in my home State of Michigan. Several companies that have been awarded incentives to grow and expand through the Michigan Strategic Fund have had to dial back planned expansions due to hiring challenges. The Pure Michigan Talent Connect website lists nearly 100,000 open jobs and positions across a range of industries. Businesses simply cannot find qualified individuals to fill their open jobs. It threatens our Nation, and we must address it.

In efforts to assess the needs of our education system over the last 5 months, I have met with students, administrators, teachers, and employers throughout my congressional district. Every single employer I have met since I started office have told me the same thing, believe it or not. They need more employees with the skills necessary, the core technical skills necessary, to contribute in the workforce. Despite expensive and extensive recruitment efforts, they can't find them. It is creating a real problem.

They are turning down work and turning down opportunity and growth across this Nation and in my district because they cannot find skilled employees.

Schools in my community recognize this problem, but too often their hands are tied, needing to ensure that students meet arbitrary standards and testing metrics. Here is the irony: rather than ensuring that they are prepared for employment in the community, we worry about test scores.

School leaders throughout my district have asked for one thing: more flexibility to offer choices to students and families to develop skills to meet the needs of employers and, frankly, the needs of the 21st century.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act would give additional flexibility to the community that education leaders are asking for. It will also allow States to better accommodate the local workforce needs. Schools, parents, employers, and teachers have made it clear: career and technical education can be improved by making it more relevant to students and employers, ensuring programs are accountable, involving all stakeholders, and granting more flexibility.

The bipartisan Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act achieves those goals. I am proud to support it as one step to expand the educational opportunities in choice in this country.

Mr. SMUCKER. I thank Representative MITCHELL for his comments. Again, I appreciate not only his passion for this issue, but the wealth of experience in this field that he brings to the table, and I look forward as well to continuing to work with him on this issue.

I now would like to yield to, once again, another freshman Member of the class who I very much enjoy working with, Mr. FERGUSON.

Mr. FERGUSON. I thank Mr. SMUCKER for yielding to me.

I, too, would like to express my appreciation for Representative THOMPSON for taking the lead on this on our side of aisle. He did a great job. I also appreciate Representative KRISHNAMOORTHI from Illinois, who worked tirelessly to make this a real solid bill. So thanks to both of them. Thank you for taking time to lead these Special Orders tonight.

In my district and throughout Georgia, our school systems, technical colleges, and communities are creating innovative career tech opportunities to help transition students into a workforce through dual enrollment with the Technical College System of Georgia, work-based learning apprenticeships, and Career Academies like the THINC Academy in LaGrange, the Central Education Center in Newnan, and 12 for Life in Carrollton, Georgia.

These programs are helping our young people make the transition from high school directly into the work-

force, and they are also helping adult learners transition into new careers.

I visited these centers and learned about these education programs, and they provide a meaningful transition for these students. They rely heavily on the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. This is a pivotal workforce development tool. It enables our education leaders to develop tailored programs that reflect the workforce needs, leveraging small dollars for very large outcomes.

Travelling throughout my district, the number one issue I hear from business and education leaders is workforce development. I have seen examples across the Third District of how community stakeholders are pulling together to do their part to develop career tech education and, in turn, create opportunities for young people to climb the ladder of success.

I am so impressed by the emerging partnerships that have naturally come about as these groups work to close the skills gap that we have in this country. They know the urgent need we have to educate students and develop these skills to fill the demands of a 21st century job.

This is a story of so many of our communities across the country and the reason why I support the effort to move forward and reauthorize the Perkins CTE. Reauthorizing Perkins CTE will upgrade the law and more accurately reflect the needs and work being done by States and local communities, providing flexibility, streamlined application processes, promoting partnerships, accountability, and a limited Federal role.

It is time to make these reforms, and I proudly support H.R. 2353.

Mr. SMUCKER. I thank Mr. FERGUSON for his comments. As he mentioned, this is about family-sustaining jobs. Mr. FERGUSON has a lot of experience bringing jobs to his town of West Point in Georgia, where he was mayor, creating thousands of new jobs there through innovative policies. I look forward to continuing to work with him on this as well.

Now I yield to another colleague on the Education and Workforce Committee who has been a leading voice as well on CTE, Mr. WILSON.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. I thank Congressman LLOYD SMUCKER for yielding to me. I appreciate his dedicated leadership to the people of Pennsylvania.

Students and businesses in South Carolina know firsthand the importance of an educated workforce to promote jobs. They also know that quality education doesn't have to come at the time and expense of a traditional 4-year college degree to achieve fulfilling jobs.

While visiting these schools and businesses across the Second District of South Carolina, I regularly learn how they have positively benefited from career and technical education programs that create jobs and lead to fulfilling lives.

With career and technical education, students can incorporate practical skills and training into their educational experience; skills that are valuable to the workforce to create jobs.

Businesses in South Carolina especially appreciate the opportunity to work with the technical colleges to work to close the skills gap and hire trained, experienced employees for highly technical jobs.

I have been grateful to have the opportunity to visit Midlands Technical College, Aiken Technical College, and Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, along with the extraordinary programs at their area high schools.

I am grateful for the work of the Apprenticeship Carolina, readySC, and the South Carolina Technical College System for their role in connecting students with employers.

I also appreciate the countless businesses in South Carolina, like Boeing, Michelin, MTU, Fluor, and others that support the career and technical education programs and hire students from the programs or facilitate apprenticeship programs for meaningful jobs. In fact, these programs have been the basis for establishing the tire industry in South Carolina where, in the district I represent, Michelin is the largest single tire manufacturer in the world at that location.

Additionally, with Bridgestone, which is Japanese; Continental, which is German; Michelin, which is French; Giti, which is GT, which is Singapore; and soon a Chinese tire manufacturer, because of the training programs we have, South Carolina now is the leading manufacturer and exporter of tires of any State in the United States.

Additionally, with BMW, South Carolina is the leading exporter of cars of any State in the United States. In fact, last year, \$9.4 billion worth of BMWs were exported out of Charleston for worldwide distribution.

While South Carolina has been highly successful in promoting career and technical education programs, I hope all communities across the country can experience the success that we have achieved creating jobs.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act will reduce regulations and allow State and local leaders to create career and technical education programs best for their communities.

As the House of Representatives will consider the bipartisan Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act soon, I urge all of my colleagues to support this job-creating legislation for meaningful and productive families.

Mr. SMUCKER. I thank Mr. WILSON for his comments.

I am happy to say that I am one of those who supports the economy in South Carolina by buying those Bridgestone and Firestone tires for my vehicles.

Mr. WILSON has been a strong advocate, obviously, for the people of his

district, the people of his State, and has been a leader in regards to CTE. I look forward to working with him on this bill as well.

I think I will have one more speaker, who is on the way. As I wait for him, Mr. WILSON talked about some of the schools in his area that have been doing a great job in connecting people, training people, educating people for the kind of jobs that are available in our workforces.

Pennsylvania's 16th Congressional District is home to Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, and it is an incredible story and similar to stories of many of the other institutions that are providing career and technical education.

There was a job fair recently at Thaddeus Stevens College, and for just a few hundred graduates, there were about 450 companies essentially competing for those individuals, competing to fill spots they had. So it goes without saying that the placement rate at many of these schools—I know certainly at Thaddeus Stevens College—is almost 100 percent placement rate. They have a problem, in fact, sometimes keeping people until graduation because students are offered jobs even before they graduate, and they are hired away.

□ 1730

Some of the students coming out of Thaddeus Stevens College are earning, on average, \$45,000 annually. We have the Marcellus shale drilling in our area, welders, some of them are earning up to six figures, \$100,000 or more in the first or second year of employment. So, again, the kind of jobs that we are talking about here are great-paying, family-sustaining jobs.

My district is also home to Reading Area Community College and the Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences, both of which offer CTE programs. We have spoken with, as a part of leading up to this bill being introduced, their faculty, students, and staff about how some of these programs can be improved.

Harrisburg Area Community College has a campus in my district in Lancaster. They do something that I think we will be seeing more of and should be seeing more of: they run an innovative apprenticeship program. They brought together private businesses that work with the school to help prepare skilled workers to fill available jobs. It is a very innovative program. The program has been very, very successful.

Future initiatives there include expanding the program into our local high schools to ensure that graduates are college or career ready. It is an opportunity that I think we have across the country.

If you look at some other models, some of the European countries—for instance, I just had a long, extensive conversation with the Swiss Ambassador about the apprenticeship program in Switzerland.

Here, we often think of apprenticeship in what we may refer to as blue-collar workers, construction and manufacturing. In Switzerland, I was told that they have apprenticeship programs in up to 230 careers. So it is bankers and insurers. Many, many different companies are taking advantage of the apprenticeship program there.

It gets to the student debt problem that we hear so much about. Here, students are earning a degree. In an apprenticeship program, students are earning a degree while earning dollars, so it sort of does away with that, if you think about it. You are earning dollars as you are learning. So it is a great model that I hope to see more of here.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Rhode Island (Mr. LAN-GEVIN).

Mr. LANGEVIN. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding, and I thank Representative SMUCKER for holding this Special Order.

Madam Speaker, as co-chair of the Career and Technical Education Caucus, I rise to highlight the importance of career and technical education for our Nation's workforce. I really appreciate all of the comments that the gentleman just mentioned, and I concur.

Madam Speaker, across Rhode Island, I continue to hear from employers struggling to find skilled workers to fill open jobs in fields such as manufacturing, IT, and other trades.

Hundreds of thousands of high-skilled, high-paying jobs are right now unfulfilled in our country, and this number is continuing to grow. Especially as we hear about bringing jobs back from overseas, manufacturing, just by way of example, has changed dramatically. These factories are no longer the old, dirty, noisy manufacturing factories of old that, say, our fathers or grandfathers were used to. They are now all high-tech. You see robots doing a lot of the manufacturing that require both programming and sophisticated knowledge how to run this advanced equipment.

So the jobs are coming back, but they are coming back in different ways, needing different skills. And right now we need to ensure that our workforce is equipped with the tools to meet the demands of the economy to close our Nation's skills gap. We can do this by better aligning education and industry.

Our students, Madam Speaker, should be learning the skills they need to succeed in growing economic sectors. This is one of the most important investments that we can make in our Nation's future.

The Governor of Rhode Island, Governor Raimondo, likes to say: We need to give our workers the skills that matter for jobs that pay.

In the Ocean State, the newly opened Westerly Education Center right now is working to promote CTE, providing a range of courses to help Rhode Islanders to meet the current and projected needs of the region's economy. The

Westerly Education Center effectively brings together higher education, industry, and community partners to ensure students of all ages are prepared for workforce opportunities in Rhode Island. Classes range from industry-specific skills training to courses in critical thinking, management, and also soft skills.

CTE courses, Madam Speaker, are in demand. Approximately 12.5 million high school and college students are enrolled in CTE across the Nation. But Federal investment in this area has decreased, actually, since 2011, and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act hasn't been authorized since 2006. I am hoping that we are going to be able to see this act reauthorized very soon.

Perkins is the primary Federal investment in CTE, and the most important thing that we can do to support CTE across the country, to support students and businesses across the country, is to reauthorize this legislation. It needs to be updated for our changing economy, and funding for CTE programs must be increased to support growing programs across the Nation.

Last Congress, I know that the House overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan Strengthening Career and Technical Education Act, and I call on my colleagues to do the same in this Congress as well. It was, in some ways, a rare moment of bipartisanship in the Congress and a great example of how we can work together. Hopefully, that will lead to other things as well.

H.R. 2353 recently passed unanimously by the Education and the Workforce Committee, and it is, again, the product of an inclusive and thoughtful process. I commend the chairman of the Education and the Workforce Committee and the ranking member and all of the members on both sides of the aisle for working so closely together—again, a very complicated piece of legislation that passed unanimously out of committee.

So, again, I thank my fellow CTE Caucus co-chair as well, Representative THOMPSON from Pennsylvania, for all of his great work on this bill. He is a member of the Education and the Workforce Committee, and he is the co-chair of the CTE Caucus. We work in lockstep on these matters. It has been a pleasure to work with him. I am grateful for his leadership, along with many other colleagues.

It makes many necessary updates to Perkins, with an emphasis on training students for the skills that they will need in high-growth economic sectors. The bill contains several important reforms, including increasing collaboration between education and industry, expanding student access to apprenticeships, supporting career counselors, and aligning State performance indicators with local labor markets, among other things.

Unfortunately, at a time when it is more crucial than ever to invest in CTE, the President's budget has proposed, though, a budget for fiscal year

2018 that cuts Perkins State grants by 15 percent. That is more than \$168 million across the country. In Rhode Island, that Perkins funding cut would mean a cut of more than \$800,000. If enacted, the President's budget would not only slash a crucial investment in our students, but it would deeply hurt businesses.

If we want businesses to come back to the country from overseas, if we want to relocate those jobs here, we need to make sure that we have the workforce that can actually do the jobs that would be available and that are, in fact, available right now.

This is the time to invest in workforce development, not undermine it. Demand for CTE is growing from students and industry, and our economy desperately needs it.

Madam Speaker, in closing, let me just say that I encourage my colleagues to prioritize CTE. It matters for your constituents, and it yields big returns for our States' economies and for our Nation's economy as a whole. Put simply, providing workers with the skills necessary to thrive in the economy is essential to our economic prosperity. It is the right thing to do, giving our workers the skills they need for jobs that pay.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative LANGEVIN. His points are very good. We appreciate his leadership as co-chair of the CTE Caucus and for the work that he has done in bringing this bill to the point where it is now.

He is right. It was passed unanimously out of the Education and the Workforce Committee. We thank the chair of the committee for making that a priority. We hope it passes the floor of the House—it did, of course, last session—and then we hope it becomes a priority for the Senate as well. It is important.

He has mentioned some of the schools, the institutions, in his district. I have talked about some in mine. I have heard from all of them. Not only have they given input into the bill itself and how we can improve the entire system across the country, but they have also talked about the importance of the grants that are provided to them through the Perkins Act. Reauthorization will be very beneficial in keeping those grants going, in providing the help that we can from the Federal level. So I thank him.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude with my remarks, I would first, again, like to thank all of my colleagues who have participated in this bipartisan Special Order. It is really, as we have seen, a bipartisan issue here.

I thank Congressman KRISHNAMOORTHI for helping to colead this and for cosponsoring the bill, along with Congressman THOMPSON.

In my own background, I was someone with a nontraditional education. I recognize the importance of providing our constituents with educational pathways that provide them the skills

necessary to launch successful careers. In my experience, I know firsthand what it is like to work a full-time job while attending school, and I believe that it is important that we accommodate the needs of many different types of students that are ready to learn and willing to work.

So, again, I am excited and very happy to cosponsor and support the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act. This bill empowers State and local community leaders. It improves alignment with in-demand jobs, those jobs that we have been talking about. It increases transparency and accountability, and it ensures a limited Federal role, putting the decisionmaking where it should be.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned before, but, in closing, I thank my Pennsylvania colleague, Representative G.T. THOMPSON, for his leadership on this critically important legislation. The level of support for strengthening career and technical education among my colleagues in the House and on a bipartisan basis is absolutely outstanding, and I am very eager to continue finding new ways in which we can grow CTE and apprenticeship programs and expand access for Pennsylvania's working people to allow them to help achieve the American Dream.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RASKIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Speaker, I am delighted to be here on behalf of the Progressive Caucus. This is our Special Order hour. We have decided to devote our remarks this evening to the testimony of former FBI Director Comey, who testified in the U.S. Senate today.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Speaker, today, America watched former FBI Director Comey offer his testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. It was a dramatic and serious moment in the history of our country and in the unfolding of the crisis related to the investigation of Russia's involvement in the U.S. election and then the firing of General Flynn by President Trump.

□ 1745

This was the first time that Director Comey spoke publicly about his firing

by President Trump and the investigation since he left the FBI, and his testimony confirmed much of what has been reported about the matter.

Now, what any reasonable-minded observer would have to conclude after watching the testimony today, after reading Mr. Comey's testimony, is that President Trump was trying mightily to use his office and his influence to get Director Comey to drop the investigation of General Flynn, his former National Security Advisor. Indeed, President Trump as much as said so when he said that he had fired Director Comey because he was unhappy about the Russian investigation and, presumably, the Russian investigation into General Flynn.

Now, Madam Speaker, distinguished colleagues, look how far we have come over the last several months. The President of the United States hired a National Security Advisor after being warned not to by the former President of the United States, by then-President Obama. That National Security Advisor lasted a total of 24 days in office, when it was determined that he had lied to Vice President PENCE about his dealings with Russia. And then later we learned that he was a registered foreign agent, or he registered retroactively as a foreign agent, an agent for a foreign government. Now, think how dramatic this sequence of events is.

Imagine, if you will, if President Barack Obama had met with Attorney General Eric Holder and Vice President Joe Biden and FBI Director Comey in his office and then asked Vice President Biden and Attorney General Holder to leave his office, saying that he wanted to speak alone to the FBI Director, and then proceeded, essentially, to tell FBI Director Comey that he wanted him to drop the investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails, saying, you know, "Hillary Clinton's a good woman. She's a good person, and I hope you can just let the investigation into her emails go. Just let it go," and to demand repeatedly for absolute personal loyalty.

Now, as it happened, Director Comey refused to take a vow of absolute loyalty to the President. After all, he takes an oath of office to the Constitution of the United States and the people of the country, so he couldn't say that he would give absolute loyalty to the President of the United States. That is not consistent with our constitutional form of government.

But imagine that this had happened under the Obama administration. Obama had made a similar demand of FBI Director Comey who was investigating, after all, Hillary Clinton's emails, had dismissed the Vice President and the Attorney General to have a one-on-one conversation, and then said, "I really hope that you let this go," using the full trappings of his office and his influence to try to get the FBI Director to drop the investigation.