

April 18, 2016

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Make Career Technical Education a Top Congressional Priority in 2016

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leaders McConnell, Pelosi, and Reid:

The undersigned organizations, representing a broad cross section of construction contractor, supplier, and labor organizations, urge you to make career technical education a top legislative priority this year.

By restoring near-term certainty to federal transportation programs and tax policy through passage of the FAST and PATH Acts in late 2015, Congress has set the stage for growth in construction, manufacturing, and business purchasing. However, as companies prepare to take advantage of new opportunities, they are confronted with a new challenge: a shortage of skilled technical workers.

A recent study sponsored by Associated Equipment Distributors (AED) provides a snapshot of how just one sector of the construction industry is being affected by the national skills gap. The report, which was prepared by researchers at the College of William & Mary, found that the equipment technician shortage is costing dealers approximately \$2.4 billion per year in lost revenue and economic opportunity and that the average job open rate for technical positions at construction equipment dealerships is more than three times the national average. Additionally, the study found that a lack of hard skills is the top reason technician positions are going unfilled, that high school, community college, and technical school curricula are not aligned with employer needs, and that the skills gap has hindered company growth and increased costs and inefficiencies.

The AED study also found that the technician shortage has made it difficult to meet customer demand in the varied industries equipment distributors serve (construction, mining, agriculture, energy, etc.), underscoring how a skills gap in one sector of the economy can affect several others.

Businesses, schools, and government must collectively commit to tackling the technical education crisis at the local, state, and federal levels. One opportunity for Congress to do so is to prioritize reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The Perkins Act, which provides funding for career and technical education programs, expired several years ago and is overdue for reauthorization and updating.

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Perkins Act reauthorization is a chance for lawmakers to work in bipartisan manner on an issue with enormous economic consequences. The reauthorization process would provide an opportunity to spotlight the skills gap, create incentives to ensure that technical training programs better consider local employer needs, channel additional resources to new sector-based workforce strategies that connect employers, schools, and local government, and highlight the fact that short-term, skills and job-oriented training programs can play as significant a role in the education of skilled workers as full-blown college degree programs.

Simply put, by making technical education a priority, Congress can help better prepare workers for well-paying careers, ensure that U.S. companies are able to seize new business opportunities, and make the United States more competitive in the global economy.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you in a bipartisan manner to seize this important opportunity.

Sincerely,

**American Coal Ash Association
American Concrete Pavement Association
American Concrete Pipe Association
American Concrete Pressure Pipe Association
American Institute of Steel Construction
American Rental Association
American Road and Transportation Builders Association
American Supply Association
American Traffic Safety Services Association
Associated Equipment Distributors
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute
Distribution Contractors Association
Heating, Air-conditioning and Refrigeration Distributors International
Mason Contractors Association of America
National Asphalt Pavement Association
National Association of Manufacturers
National Ground Water Association
National Ready Mixed Concrete Association
National Steel Bridge Alliance
National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association
National Utility Contractors Association
Portland Cement Association
Power and Communications Contractors Association
Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute**