Federal officials visit CT

The Day

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Groton — Federal economic officials made a visit to Connecticut on Friday to witness firsthand the state's manufacturing sector.

They ended their day in Groton at the Submarine Force Library and Museum, where they heard about partnerships to develop and train a skilled workforce for Electric Boat and other manufacturers in the state, and toured the Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Pittsburgh, the second oldest commissioned ship at the Naval Submarine Base.

Jason Miller, deputy assistant to the president for economic policy, and Assistant Commerce Secretary Jay Williams led the federal delegation.

John Beauregard, executive director of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, explained how $20 million in funding has been invested over the last five years to develop the manufacturing workforce in the state.

EWIB, the technical high schools, community colleges and others have been working together to restart and revamp local manufacturing programs to produce the skilled manufacturing workers the region needs.

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Electric Boat has helped develop the curriculum for many of the programs.

"We haven't yet scratched the surface of meeting the need that we want to get to, so your designation of Connecticut is really important to us and we really appreciate it," Beauregard said.

In July 2015, the Obama administration added Connecticut to its Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership initiative.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, in announcing Connecticut and the 11 other communities receiving the designation, said in a statement that "An IMCP designation is an important signal to potential investors that these communities are a good place to spend their money, and this is smart government at work."

EB is a big driver behind the work being done in southeastern Connecticut to develop a pipeline of skilled manufacturing workers.

The submarine builder has been plenty busy with work and, with continued congressional support, that workload is expected to increase.

In 2011, the production of Virginia-class attack submarines, which EB builds with its partner, Newport News Shipbuilding, doubled to two a year.

Federal lawmakers, including members of Connecticut's delegation, are now talking about continuing that production of two Virginia-class submarines a year, even in years when Ohio-class replacement submarines will be built, to mitigate a decline in the number of attack submarines in the mid-2020s.

But it will need to figure out a way to pay for that.

Electric Boat is the prime contractor for the Ohio-class replacement program, an estimated $100 billion project to build a new fleet of 12 ballistic missile submarines.

To carry out its workload and to replace the large number of employees retiring in the coming years, EB has ramped up its job offers.

Since the start of the year, the company has made 1,300 offers, Vice President of Human Resources Maura Dunn said Friday.

EB plans to have a workforce of 18,000 in 2030, compared with the 14,100 employees it has now.

Earlier Friday, U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, and U.S. Sens. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., held a roundtable at Ella T. Grasso Southeastern Technical High School to highlight the need for a well-trained manufacturing workforce, the importance of securing future funding to do that, and maintaining the system in place to meet workforce needs.

The lawmakers also attended a ribbon-cutting for a new welding shop at Grasso Tech.

The school is one of the locations participating in the manufacturing pipeline workforce training program run by the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, Quinebaug Valley Community College and Three Rivers Community College.

The first class graduated from the manufacturing program in May.

The 14 graduates all received conditional job offers as outside machinists.

The program will hold a class for adults at the welding shop that is expected to start in August.

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