The Day
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Sen. Murphy: Manufacturing is Connecticut's future, if we're smart about it

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Sen. Chris Murphy

You might not know **John Beauregard** by name, but chances are, his workforce development efforts have had an impact on a loved one, a friend or someone in your community. John helped develop the Eastern Connecticut Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, a group for which I helped secure the initial seed funding. And since the Initiative's inception, John, Mark Hill, the current CEO, and the rest of the team have helped prepare over 1,500 people in our state for manufacturing jobs.

I've had a chance to sit down with countless people who are now in better jobs and taking home higher wages because of this program. And I want to publicly thank John, who stepped down last year as president of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, for all his work.

Workforce development is one of those phrases that gets tossed around but doesn't often mean much to people. But at its core, these initiatives are straightforward. They provide people the chance to learn new skills in growing fields. And often, since these programs already have relationships with employers in need of quality talent, they help people secure jobs upon graduation.

On top of that, these programs are often free of charge. And they're generally designed for unemployed and under-employed individuals, so they give a leg up to those who need it most.

Now, we have to build on these successes. That's why, as we get ready to take up a badly needed infrastructure package, I'm focused on expanding workforce development opportunities.

I was excited to see that President Biden's infrastructure proposal, the American Jobs Plan, called for a $100 billion investment in a program that prepares people in underserved communities for careers in clean energy, manufacturing, and other high-demand sectors. And there were huge chunks of funding dedicated to training "dislocated workers" — those who lost jobs through no fault of their own as the economy changed under their feet.

Proposals like these would have a huge impact on workers, but it would also mean a lot for the over 4,400 manufacturers in our state. I hear all the time from CEOs and small business owners who have open jobs but can't find the talent to fill them. If we want to grow our economy and reduce unemployment, we need to make these kinds of overdue investments.

But here's my worry: if we only pass the more limited, bipartisan infrastructure agreement, we won't meet the needs of the moment. That's why we plan to move forward with a bipartisan agreement as well as a broader package that funds workforce development, climate crisis mitigation, child care programs and rail investments along the Northeast Corridor — things that actually make a meaningful difference in the lives of people in Connecticut.

Getting once-in-a-generation investments in infrastructure and manufacturing right is deeply personal to me. My grandfather and great-grandfather worked in the ball-bearing factories of New Britain. And since I came to Congress, I've worked day in and day out to support Connecticut manufacturers and workers. I've pushed to fix our Buy American laws and make sure taxpayer dollars go to American manufacturers. I secured a spot on the Appropriations Committee to help our workers get ahead and bring federal contracts back to Connecticut, especially in our defense and aerospace sectors. And I've pressured the Department of Defense, under Democratic and Republican administrations, to put U.S. manufacturers first when awarding contracts.

Now, I'm going to be pushing for workforce development programs in this infrastructure package. We have the opportunity to make sure the 21st century is Made in America, we just have to be willing to make smart, bold investments.

Chris Murphy, a Democrat, is a U.S. senator from Connecticut.