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CONGRESSMAN RO KHANNA LEADS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS

On Tuesday, June 27th, Congressman Ro Khanna of California's 17th Congressional District stopped at the PA CareerLink® Westmoreland County at Youngwood as part of his National Listening Tour. During his National Listening Tour, Congressman Khanna is visiting heartland regions of the Country to highlight the loss of jobs in the industrial sector, hear from displaced workers and understand how workforce investment monies have assisted job seekers.

During Congressman Khanna's visit at PA CareerLink®, members of the Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Investment Board, PA CareerLink®, local and retired elected officials, business owners, training providers, and union representatives were able to have an open conversation about the impact the region has had on displaced workers. The Congressman started the conversation by wanting to learn more about the history of Westmoreland and Fayette Counties and the type of jobs that are available.

"Southwestern Pennsylvania has a really strong manufacturing background with a heavy industrial history. We have over a hundred different manufacturing organizations here in the county if not more. We also have very strong unions and trade industries in Southwestern Pennsylvania," stated Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Investment Board Executive Director Janet Ward. "More recently we have seen a decline in population. That's a big challenge for our area. We know we have the workers, but we also know we have to create opportunities for workers coming in. We have more than enough job opportunities and great employers looking for workers. We don't want to lose the base or foundation of knowledge we have, which is why we are looking to retrain and reskill our workers."

By learning more about the history of the different Counties, the Congressman was interested in the impact the education system has had on younger people attending trade schools. Many of the participants spoke about their experience of how there was a push to attend college when they attended high school, with very little emphasis on the benefits of attending a technical school. Throughout the conversation, Congressman Khanna learned more about the different skilled trades that are in need in the region and different skilled trades unions which conduct apprenticeship training for many job seekers in Westmoreland and Fayette Counties.

"We need more young people going into manufacturing," stated Khanna. "We need a whole new commitment in this country to production and manufacturing so that those jobs that we know can pay well are going to be here."

Part of the Congressman's visit to the PA CareerLink® also consisted of him speaking with formerly dislocated workers who have utilized PA CareerLink® services to help them find jobs. Carrie McCurdy, a formerly dislocated employee who came to the PA CareerLink® for assistance with

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obtaining her CDL, spoke about her experience and the opportunities she has been given since participating at the PA CareerLink®.

“Through the PA CareerLink® I was able to get my CDL, which is something that I wanted to do forever but never had the money to do it or the time due to my work schedule,” shared McCurdy. “That CDL led me to a job with Shared Medical Services of Wisconsin. That really helped me. I was able to get away from [Emergency Medical Services] and still feel like I was helping people. It has brought more opportunities that I didn’t have before.”

Marissa Gilpin, a formerly dislocated individual, was able to utilize PA CareerLink® services to further her job opportunities and recently was promoted to Accountant 1 at a local company, Scott Electric.

“I got laid off because of COVID and had to take unemployment because I had no other income. Then I came to PA CareerLink® to help myself get a job. I started at Scott Electric and have been there for almost three years now,” stated Gilpin. “I would have never ever got this opportunity if it wasn’t for PA CareerLink®. It’s a really, really great company to work for, and I’m really, really happy I got that opportunity.”

Sean Riddle, an On-the-Job Training participant, spoke about his experience with the PA CareerLink® and how it has made a positive impact on his life.

“I decided that I need to go to school. I needed to do something. I am a father of four. That’s where PA CareerLink® came in,” shared Sean. “They agreed to sign me up for on-the-job training. Now I am an operations manager with a desk, business cards, email, and all of that. All of that was provided through the on-job-training with PA CareerLink®. When something needed to be done for new training, PA CareerLink® was there to help and make sure everything that needed to be put in place was there.”

Each of these individuals spoke further on the success they had by utilizing the workforce monies Congressman Khanna was there to learn more about.

Learning more about all the work the Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Investment Board and PA CareerLink® have done to outreach to the public about the services provided, the Congressman was very pleased to hear of all the success that has been happening in this region.

“I appreciate the first-hand testimony offered by Sean, Marissa and Carrie during our Roundtable discussion. Throughout my travels across the rural Heartland of our Country, I have been encouraged to learn of positive workforce investments to improve the lives of our youth and our many dislocated workers. Sean, Marissa and Carrie are perfect examples of how significant training investments can shape a better future for workers, their families, and their communities,”

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shared Khanna.

We would like to thank Congressman Khanna for taking time out of his schedule to come and speak with us.



Congressman Khanna offers opening remarks to attendees about his Heartland listening tour.



Interaction with participants is the Congressman's main goal for his Roundtable events. Here he welcomes statements along with Executive Director Janet Ward and Board Secretary Lori Albright.



Invaluable input and observations were provided by attendees Marissa Gilpin and Carrie McCurdy.

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At the conclusion of the Roundtable, retired State Representative Pam Snyder and WIB Chair of the Marketing & Government Affairs Committee Charlie Datz help the Congressman evaluate the morning's event.

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