

Floor Remarks on the Apprenticeship and Jobs Training Act
Senator Susan Collins
June 14, 2017

“Mr. President, I do rise today to speak in support of the Apprenticeship and Jobs Training Act, which Senator Cantwell and I are reintroducing today. Few issues are as important to the American people as the availability of good jobs in our communities. It is crucial that we continue to improve job training initiatives to help people find jobs in fields with open positions.

“Many business owners in Maine have told me that they do in fact have jobs available, but that they cannot find the qualified workers to fill these highly skilled vacant positions. In fact, Mr. President, I cannot visit a machine shop in the state of Maine, no matter where it is located, and find that they are not looking for skilled machinists. There is such a shortage. And those are good jobs. They are jobs with good benefits and job security.

“One way for employees to acquire the skills needed to succeed in these in-demand fields is through apprenticeship programs. Apprentices gain hands-on experience that is invaluable to them and to their employers. They help workers—these programs help workers—secure good-paying jobs.

“According to the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, more than 49,000 participants graduated from an apprenticeship program in fiscal year 2016. In Maine, we have some innovative job training apprenticeship programs at places like Bath Iron Works, which builds naval destroyers and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard which has an extraordinary program. Through these two employers, more than 2,320 young people have worked actively on industry-recognized skills, certifications in just the last year. But that number, impressive though it is for those two large employers, remains insufficient to meet the needs of employers statewide.

“We must do all that we can to ensure that an adequate pool of skilled workers is available. Our legislation would help achieve this goal by giving a \$5,000 tax credit to businesses that hire apprentices full time in high-demand mechanical or technical health care or technology professions.

“In order for a business to claim the credit, the apprentice must be employed for at least seven months. But what we find is the people who go through these apprenticeship programs stay in these jobs, thus benefiting both the worker and the employer.

“Our bill will also provide incentives for experienced workers who spend at least 20 percent of their time passing their hard-earned knowledge on to the next generation. These workers would be allowed to receive some retirement income early without facing tax penalties. That's the way that we can ensure that the experienced older worker is passing on knowledge to the next generation.

“Finally, our bill would ensure that the brave men and women who defend our country are given credit for the skills that they learned in the military while wearing our nation's uniform. Training received while serving in the armed forces would count toward an apprentice's training requirement.

“Mr. President, this bill would help to better align the needs of our nation's employers with potential employees. It would promote hiring and the creation of new jobs. It would enhance the skills that the people of our country need to obtain good-paying, secure employment.

“I know that the presiding officer and I were talking about this very issue at lunch today and the need to bridge that skills gap. I encourage all of my colleagues to support our bill, and I want to salute Senator Cantwell for her leadership over many years in working on this issue.

“This is something that should unite us all—Democrats, Republicans, Independents. It's not a partisan issue. It is looking at ways that we can help more Americans secure good-paying jobs that will last them for a lifetime. Thank you, Mr. President.