

Lamont hosts forum on jobs



Gov. Ned Lamont speaks during a community conversation on workforce development at Eastern Connecticut State University Wednesday night in Willimantic.
Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

At ECSU, governor asked about hiring, training skilled workforce

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WILLIMANTIC — Gov. Ned Lamont said Wednesday every corner of the state needs talented employees to better the ranks of Connecticut’s workforce.

The governor visited Eastern Connecticut State University Wednesday evening for a community conversation on workforce development and educational advancement.

The forum gave local residents and workers the opportunity to ask Lamont and his panel about identifying, hiring and training a talented and comprehensive workforce.

Lamont was joined by state De-

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partment of Labor Commissioner Kurt Westby; state Department of Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona; state Office of Early Child-

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hood Commissioner Beth Bye; state Department of Developmental Services Commissioner Jordan Scheff; and state Department of Economic and Community Development Deputy Commissioner Glendowlyn Thames.

Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz moderated the question-and-answer format.

“There is a need for talent,” Lamont said. “This is why we’re focused like a laser beam on making sure we can match you with the jobs that are out there right now.”

Lamont said every employer he speaks to asks how he can connect them with the students they need.

In October, Lamont created the Governor’s Workforce Council.

The group is comprised of leaders in the fields of business, education, non-profits and government.

The state delegation’s visit filled Eastern’s Student Center theater to maximum capacity with local employees, students and residents.

Many audience members discussed the role of public education in creating the next generation of workers.

David Howes, the principal of Willimantic’s new Learners Empowered to Achieve their Potential (LEAP) School, asked about how workforce development will impact and transform the current public education model.

The LEAP School is EASTCONN’s alternative high school for over-aged and under-credited students.

“For our students, to put it bluntly, we think the public education system has failed them,” Howes said.

Cardona said alternative high schools are extremely important.

“We’re realizing now that there were many students that were systematically disengaging,” Cardona said. “Your job



Jordan Scheff, commissioner of the state Department of Developmental Services, Kurt Westby, Connecticut Department of Labor commissioner, and Beth Bye, commissioner of the state Office of Early Childhood, appear during a community conversation on workforce development at Eastern Connecticut State University Wednesday night in Willimantic. Roxanne Pandolfi | Staff

is to re-engage them, and you’re finding creative ways of doing that.”

Windham Public Schools Public Information Officer Margaret Chatey asked about funding for the high school’s Early College Opportunity Program.

Programs like ECO allow students to begin training in the mechanical trades, filling a critical need for workers in the state.

“You’re putting out quality people in advanced manufacturing, but it’s just not enough,” Westby said. “Some of the prognostications are that we need up to 10,000 people in advanced manufacturing, today.”

Also discussed were barriers to a talented workforce, including affordable child care, felony forgiveness programs, student loan forgiveness programs and increasing access for minority employees.

Eastern alum and Pomfret resident Nicholas Stein said his employment is limited because he has a felony from marijuana distribution on his record.

“This is really important to thousands of people like me in our state,” Steir said. “It disproportionately affects communities of color, not just me.”

Lamont said he continues to review the possibility of expunging misdemeanors and low-level, non-violent felonies during the decriminalization and legalization process of marijuana.

“Human service commissioners, in particular, have an obligation to protect vulnerable populations,” Scheff said. “We’re second-chance oriented

“It’s a matter of crafting law and policy that will continue to protect vulnerable populations.”

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