

DEMOCRATS ANNOUNCE 2014 JOBS AND BUSINESS AGENDA

Workforce development, growing new markets, cutting red tape, helping small business top Democratic leaders' agenda

HARTFORD – Democratic legislative leaders today unveiled their jobs and business agenda for the 2014 session, focusing on employment and job training, cutting red tape, growing new markets by expanding state ports, and helping businesses grow near university campuses and fight baseless patent lawsuits.

“While Congress has failed to act to renew critical unemployment aid for more than one million Americans, here in Connecticut we are taking action to provide a lifeline for families,” said **Senate President Donald E. Williams, Jr. (D-Brooklyn)**. “The STEP-Up program has helped hundreds of Connecticut small businesses hire and train more than two thousand workers and the new workforce development programs proposed today will ensure that Connecticut residents have the skills they need to gain employment.”

“As our economy continues to recover, it is critical that we keep up our efforts to encourage an economic climate that allows business to grow and create new jobs,” said **Speaker of the House Brendan Sharkey (D-Hamden)**. “These initiatives not only reflect the legislature’s commitment to economic development, job growth, and a more friendly business climate, but are solid long-term investments for taxpayers.”

“It is imperative that the progress we have generated over the past two years not be allowed to falter,” said **Senate Majority Leader Martin M. Looney (D-New Haven)**. “These programs, these investments, will make a critical difference in the lives of Connecticut residents and Connecticut businesses.”

“Connecticut’s middle class is disappearing, and these proposals will help bring it back to life, while helping our local businesses grow,” said **House Majority Leader Joe Aresimowicz (D-Berlin & Southington)**. “Right now 66% of Connecticut businesses looking to hire are having trouble finding qualified workers. Establishing a new school-to-job program to provide Connecticut students with skills that match local employers’ needs will help us reverse this trend and get ahead of the curve.” According to the 2013 Survey of Connecticut Businesses by CBIA/Blum Shapiro, less than half of Connecticut businesses invested in employee training in 2013, and two-thirds were having trouble finding qualified employees, *even as* those businesses expected to be profitable, hire new employees and see as much as 10 percent of their existing workforce retire in the next five years.

Today's Democratic jobs and business agenda addresses those business concerns, building on various pro-business public policy initiatives begun by Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the legislature over the past several years, and now proposing:

Workforce Development

- **Re-capitalize Connecticut's highly successful STEP-Up program**, which offers employers who hire an unemployed worker either a wage subsidy to help pay a new employee's salary for the first six months, or provides a six-month training grant. Since its creation in October 2011, more than 2,000 unemployed people have been hired under STEP-Up in jobs like CNC operators, graphic designers, tool makers, welders, press operators, masons and engine builders. But the program needs a new infusion of capital; the original \$20 million budget is down to \$2.5 million, approximately enough to meet program demand through April. "In a challenging economy, STEP-Up allowed Penn Globe to help several unemployed but talented people find new career paths. Because of the program, these individuals have new skill sets, our company has increased depth and we are positioned to grow again this year," said **Marcia LaFemina, Vice President of the Pennsylvania Globe Gaslight Co.** of North Branford. "We look forward to bringing more people on board in 2014 with the STEP-Up program."
- **Implement new school-to-job programs** such as an accelerated certificate program (12 months) combining basic education and technical and career training; an I-Best program for adult students lacking a GED which combines GED preparation with real-world skills training, and an Advanced Manufacturing Certificate Program where students combine paid work and college level study towards the attainment of an associate's degree. "The I-Best program provided me with a focus and direction that I didn't have before," said Lori Fisher, a graduate of the EastConn I-Best Technology Academy. "It gave me the ability to pursue my associates degree in human services, and the training that will help ensure my success in this field."
- **Continue entrepreneurial tax incentives** such as the Angel Investor Tax Credit and the Insurance Reinvestment Tax Credit.

Cutting Red Tape

- **Pre-permitting** business development, renovation or new construction by pre-approving zoning and environmental reviews in order to save businesses time and money. The program would be based on New York's 'Empire State Development's Build Now,' where communities select and prepare sites for specifically targeted economic development, reducing the time normally needed to develop a site.
- Establish a procedure for transferring and selling Brownfield Redevelopment properties that begins with the state cleaning up selected brownfield sites and then marketing them to private developers (presently, the state must identify a potential interest in a site before it begins remediation.) In addition to these selected sites, provide funding for state and municipally owned brownfield properties to conduct remediation studies to determine the potential hazards and costs associated with their cleanup and develop a plan for their remediation.

Growing New Markets by Establishing a Statewide Port Authority

- Create a quasi-public agency, similar to the new state airport authority, to **coordinate the development of the Bridgeport, New Haven and New London ports**, seek federal and state funds for dredging and infrastructure improvements, market the ports to the domestic and international shipping industry, and develop strategic entrepreneurial activities. A 2012 market analysis of Connecticut ports revealed four existing business lines in need of retention and expansion efforts by the state (liquid bulk, private ferry services, ship repair services and dry bulk cargoes) as well four niche cargo opportunities for new business lines: scrap metal exports from New Haven, wood pellet exports from New London, break bulk lumber, copper, and steel imports to New Haven or New London, and fresh food imports to New Haven and New London.

Helping Business Development

- **Establish ‘social benefit corporations,’** a new type of corporation intended to use a portion of its profits to benefit society or the environment without fear of shareholder action. 16 states have enacted b-corp legislation, including Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Vermont. Examples of b-corps include AND1 athletic clothing, Cabots Creamery, King Arthur Flour, Seventh Generation household products and Patagonia clothing.
- **Protect businesses from ‘patent trolls,’** law firms or individuals who neither make a product nor perform a service, but who allege they are enforcing a patent that they did not file and which they are now seeking usage fees for. Just last year, a patent troll tried to sue a company in Old Lyme, claiming the owner owed them money every time they scanned and e-mailed a document from their office copier.
- **Expand business enterprise zones** to include incentives for businesses to locate on or near university campuses in order to take advantage of university resources and create jobs.