

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (OR-01)

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, Secondary Education Hearing

"From Classroom to Career: Strengthening Skills Pathways Through CTE"

Wednesday, November 19, 2025 | 2 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses. I know we have both been looking forward to this hearing.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this hearing today where we can talk about the importance of career and technical education, which historically has had broad bipartisan support. But I do want to address the deeply troubling actions that threaten CTE's effectiveness and long-standing bipartisan legacy.

Early this year, President Trump kicked off his second term by signing an executive order to dismantle and close the Department of Education. As part of that effort, the executive branch used a questionable interagency agreement (or IAA) to transfer much of the administration of CTE and Adult Education programs from the Department of Education (ED) to the Department of Labor (DOL). Along with this, \$2 billion in funding for programs under the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) was transferred out of ED and into DOL.

And just yesterday, the Department announced six new interagency agreements to move more critical education programs to the Departments of Labor, Interior, and Health and Human Services. This is not routine, and the consequences of this agreement on students will be far-reaching. It is also part of a broader effort to shut down the Department of Education without the consent of Congress. We should all be concerned about the destructive message shutting down the Department of Education. What does that say about our country? Scattering programs and resources across offices that aren't equipped to administer them will hurt students and schools. I want to make clear today that we must fight to reclaim our Article I responsibility and conduct oversight over the Administration to reverse these irresponsible decisions.

Moving the administration of CTE to DOL is a mistake for a number of reasons. First, CTE is more than job training or short-term job placement. It helps students—many of them as early as middle school—explore careers, build skills, and prepare for higher education or long-term careers in high-demand fields. That kind of lifelong learning pipeline can't be built or maintained without staff who have spent their careers crafting educational pathways—not just administering workforce training grants. Which is also important, but a different task. Offloading these programs to an agency that lacks that background is a disservice to our children and their future. It also violates the *Perkins Act*, which I worked with several of my colleagues here today to reauthorize in 2018, when it was signed into law by President Trump.

Second, these programs are objectively worse off now that they've been moved to DOL. Under the Department of Education, these programs were aligned with academic standards, focused on long-term success, and embedded into the educational ecosystem at the state and local level. The DOL's job training programs, by contrast, are often short-term, disconnected from education systems, and focused on immediate employment rather than sustained learning. This shift risks turning CTE into the very type of narrow vocational training we worked for

decades to move away from— we support it, but it’s not the same as CTE— where students, often from low-income families or communities of color, were tracked into limited job paths with little room for upward mobility. Ironically, the transfer of these programs from ED to DOL has created more bureaucratic inefficiencies, not reduced them. States, school districts, and institutions of higher education are now forced to navigate two different agencies to access one program. We’ve heard stories from states that are spending all their time learning a new grant management system instead of doing what they should be doing — which is innovating. Delays in grant processing and decision-making are already being reported, and we’ve only just begun to see the fallout. It’s pretty chaotic.

Third, the innovation we’ve seen in CTE over the past decade is now at risk. That progress was made possible because states had the flexibility to tailor programs to meet the needs of their students and local economies. But this new hyper-partisan shift, driven not by educational best practices but by ideology, threatens to stifle innovation. A bipartisan success story is now being drawn into a federal bureaucratic tug-of-war, placing unnecessary hurdles in front of states that were leading the way in expanding access and improving outcomes, including my home state of Oregon.

I want to emphasize this: career and technical education works. It works because it is education-driven. It works because it was crafted in a bipartisan manner and in partnership with educators, employers, and communities. It works because it is the kind of engaging, hands-on problem-solving learning that engages students. And it works because we had career professionals in the Department of Education who understood the difference between preparing students for the future and just placing them in a job.

I wish we could spend this whole hearing discussing the exciting innovations in CTE that states like my home state of Oregon are leading. My state has made CTE a priority, and we’ve seen absenteeism decrease, and we have seen graduation rates increase. I’ve toured amazing programs, including a culinary arts program at Lincoln High School in Portland, a fish hatchery management program at Warrenton High School, health sciences in Hillsboro, and a program in Sherwood where the students actually design, build, and then sell a home. These have provided incredible opportunities for students to learn collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and responsibility. But unfortunately, this Administration is dragging us into another partisan fight. Just look at the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025, which laid the groundwork for this illegal move of this program and shutting down the Department of Education.

So we cannot afford to let CTE be undermined. Congress must reject this misguided transfer, restore these programs at the Department of Education where they belong, and guarantee that any future changes go through the proper legislative channels — not through backdoor bureaucratic maneuvers. Our goal should be to improve and innovate CTE.

This isn’t just a matter of process — it’s a matter of protecting the future of millions of learners. Thank you. I look forward to hearing the witnesses’ testimony, and with that, I yield back.