

CONGRESSMAN **Frank Lucas**  
proudly representing  Oklahoma's 3<sup>rd</sup> district



**FRANKLY SPEAKING:**

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## **Oklahoma's career and technical education is building a better tomorrow**

by Congressman Frank Lucas (R- Okla.)

The beginning of March marks the end of Career and Technical Education Month across the United States. Such end marks another occasion to celebrate the endless opportunities that Oklahoma's CareerTech System provides for hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans.

For years, employers expressed concern about filling manufacturing and technical jobs. The need for a workforce who would become our nation's mechanics, engineers, and other skilled laborers became a greater urgency pushing states to adopt programs rising to meet the nation's challenges.

And for more than 100 years, Oklahoma has risen to meet those challenges.

Oklahoma has championed efforts and developed world-class career and technical education programs- delivering on the promises of building a better tomorrow.

Whether it is in the labs and shops of Oklahoma high schools or on one of the 58 technology center campuses, young Oklahomans have the opportunity to hone skills that will make them sought after members of our state's workforce. Many students find a passion in the CareerTech system that turns into a lifelong career, enabling them to contribute to their families and communities in a positive way.

Oklahoma CareerTech has worked with our state's business and industry community to develop customized, on-demand training programs for both employers and employees. These industry-leading programs prepare employees to operate new equipment or emerging technology, upgrade or expand their current skills, enhance the safety procedures of a workplace, and much more.

The investment in such programs proves Oklahoma is open for business and allows for industries to provide more opportunities to the hard-working people of Oklahoma. Industry leaders are more-willing to start an enterprise or expand existing operations if they know they have a workforce ready to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As most Oklahomans know, the brighter and more valuable the workforce, the healthier the economy.

Nationwide, our economy is booming. The latest Bureau of Economic Analysis report analyzing our nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) shows that our economy, in 2018, grew at its strongest rate in 13 years- rounding the year out annually at 2.9 percent and rising 3.1 percent from the previous fourth quarter.

In Oklahoma, according to the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report, the state's annual average unemployment rate decreased from 4.2 percent in 2017 to 3.4 percent in 2018.

Along with a renewed confidence in the economy, Americans are also witnessing the fastest level of wage growth in a decade, record low unemployment, and increased business investments.

From automotive and aeronautics to cabinetry and textiles, Oklahoma's CareerTech System served a total 6,948 businesses and 558,007 students and added \$3.5 billion to the state's economy.

In 2017, I was proud to support the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act. This bill, which was signed into law last summer, modernizes the allocation process from which career and technical education programs receive federal funding. It is essential that the laws that govern programs like CTE evolve at a rate that allows for innovation and expansion, while maintaining local control over how these funds are used. I have always been a supporter of career and technical education during my time in Washington and will continue to do so as long as I hold this office.

Oklahoma's economic successes come from a number of factors, including strong, pro-growth economic policies enacted on the federal and state level, forward-thinking entrepreneurs and industry leaders, and a capable and stable workforce. The Oklahoma CareerTech System is critical to maintaining and strengthening our state's economic power, ensuring that today's workforce is well-equipped for tomorrow's job opportunities.

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