



U.S. LABOR SECRETARY Martin J. Walsh, left, participates Monday in a panel discussion about workforce development at Building Futures, a Providence-based job training program. At right in Gov. Daniel J. McKee. PBN PHOTO/CASSIUS SHUMAN

PROVIDENCE – U.S. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh toured Rhode Island with state leaders on Monday to learn about the state’s workforce challenges and needs – activities that officials said were designed, in part, to build a relationship with the secretary as they prepare to use \$1.1 billion in federal relief funds.

As part of Monday’s events, Walsh and Rhode Island’s congressional delegation visited the New England Institute of Technology before Walsh and Gov. Daniel J. McKee discussed workforce challenges facing Rhode Island with a panel of workforce development professionals assembled at Building Futures, a Providence-based workforce training facility.



CURRENT ISSUE SUBSCRIBER ONLY ▾ NEWS ▾ HEALTH CARE ▾ EDUCATION ▾ REAL ESTATE ▾

DATA CENTER ▾ EVENTS ▾ MORE ▾ SUBMIT ▾

Subscribe Logout

Part of that includes \$500 million in funding from the Commerce Department with its Good Job Challenges via the Economic Development Administration, which will fund collaborative skills training systems and programs across the country, said Weldon.

Weldon said the state is looking at ways to use the \$1.1 billion it received in American Rescue Plan Act funding to aid workforce development. Part of the process involves introducing Walsh to Rhode Island's workforce development ecosystem, across various industry sectors, he said.

Also noted was that two crucial Cabinet seats in the Biden administration contain people with a strong familiarity with the region – Walsh is the former mayor of Boston, and U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina M. Raimondo is the former governor of Rhode Island.

In addition, Walsh said he and Raimondo agreed to work together when they were appointed by President Joe Biden. It was something that Biden insisted on when first meeting with them, he said.

"It shouldn't be labor on one side of the table and commerce on the other," Walsh said. "We need to work together."

Weldon said the availability of federal relief and the prospect of two allies in Washington coordinating their efforts presented a "once-in-a-lifetime moment" for Rhode Island.

Weldon said there are opportunities, but there are also barriers, hindering the state's workforce. "So, we're talking about using these resources to address those barriers and put people into jobs," he said.

Weldon sees a six-tenths of a percentage point drop in the unemployment rate last month as a sign that the workforce is



CURRENT ISSUE SUBSCRIBER ONLY ▾ NEWS ▾ HEALTH CARE ▾ EDUCATION ▾ REAL ESTATE ▾

DATA CENTER ▾ EVENTS ▾ MORE ▾ SUBMIT ▾

Subscribe Logout

Weldon said the Building Futures apprenticeship program provides opportunities for workers by exposing trainees in a hands-on fashion to work in the building trades.

Building Futures website states that more than 300 alumni of its trainees work in more than a dozen trades, building commercial buildings, schools, hospitals, highways, and bridges.

McKee said the state will look to take advantage of funding provided through Biden's \$2.25 trillion American Jobs Plan. That plan is aimed at improving the nation's infrastructure and shifting to greener energy over the next eight-year period.

"It's not every day that we have a Cabinet secretary in Rhode Island," said McKee. "To have a secretary that understands what it means to earn a living, and to work every day, and have a president that wants to invest this way, we're blessed."

"But if we want to really get our families back to work, we need to take care of our kids," said McKee, who noted that addressing child care and education are top priorities for the state's workforce.

The panel of workforce development professionals spoke about their needs and concerns, echoing McKee's sentiments.

Michael F. Sabitoni, president of the Rhode Island Building and Construction Trades Council, said that his industry needs more workers. "Recruitment and retainment are going to be pivotal moving forward," he said.

Sabitoni said there needs to be an increase in wages with suitable benefits and childcare assistance to support the workforce.

pay people less doesn't mean that you should."

Cassius Shuman is a PBN staff writer. Contact him at Shuman@PBN.com. You may also follow him on Twitter @CassiusShuman.



Want to share this story? [Click Here](#) to purchase a link that allows anyone to read it on any device whether or not they are a subscriber.

No posts to display

SUBSCRIBE TO

PBN's All Access Subscription

PBN subscribers get ahead with unlimited access to PBN news, information, and insights from our editorial team, research and data, webinars and much more.

Subscribe

SIGN UP FOR
