

(Washington, D.C.) – On the first day of the 111th Congress, U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) reintroduced the Online Job Training Act and the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Battlefield Protection Act.

The Online Job Training Act (H.R. 145) would provide grants to states to establish or improve workforce training programs on the Internet. The bill would make job training more accessible and convenient for prospective workers. The legislation is based on a successful online learning pilot program run by the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development and Rutgers University.

“In 2009, our first priority must be jobs, jobs, and jobs,” Holt said. “We need innovative programs that help get people back to work, and online job training is one such program that merits our support.”

Under the bill, each state would be eligible for \$100,000 in federal funding to implement or enhance online courses as part of their workforce investment programs. The bill would also authorize \$1 million for the creation of a national center for excellence in online job training to coordinate with state and local workforce investment boards as they develop technology-driven methods for education and job training.

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development pilot program has demonstrated the value and effectiveness of online courses in providing skills training and education to low waged workers. This program, developed by Dr. Mary Gatta, Director of Workforce Policy and Research at Rutgers University’s Center for Women and Work, provided 128 women with a computer, Internet connection and access to online courses. Nearly all the women completed the program, and participants experienced a 14 percent annual wage increase.

One New Jersey woman took a course at night, while working in a residential group home. Because she was gaining certificates and job training in Excel and Access, her employer gave her a promotion to digitize and then manage the bookkeeping/database. In fact, she competed with another employee with more seniority for the promotion, and received the promotion specifically because of her job training. With the money from the promotion, she was able to start saving to send her daughter to college.

“Congressman’s Holt’s bill demonstrates the importance of using technology to better deliver education and training to all Americans,” Gatta said. “Over the years, many other states have implemented similar online learning programs for marginalized groups, and this bill represents a significant next step in scaling these programs up nationwide.”

The Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Battlefield Protection Act (H.R. 146) would establish a federal grant program specifically for preserving and protecting battle sites associated with the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Urbanization, suburban sprawl, and unplanned commercial and residential development have encroached on many of the significant battlefields of the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. According to a 2007 National Parks Service (NPS) report, 170 of 677 nationally significant sites associated with the two wars are in danger of being destroyed in the next 10 years, including sites in Trenton and Princeton. At least 33 states could benefit if the bill becomes law. The bill passed the House in the 110th Congress but did not receive a vote in the Senate.

“The battlefields of the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 provide a unique opportunity for Americans to experience where and how the epic struggle for our nation’s independence took place,” Holt said. “Preserving these American historic treasures is essential in remembering the sacrifices that our forefathers made to secure our freedom and independence, and in educating future generations about our rich cultural history.”

Enactment of Holt’s legislation would set aside funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the preservation and protection of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields and related historical sites, as is currently done for Civil War sites. The bill would allow officials at the American Battlefield Protection Program to collaborate with state and local governments and non profit organizations to preserve and protect the most endangered historical sites and to provide up to 50 percent of the costs of purchasing battlefield land threatened by sprawl and commercial development.

In addition to the 170 sites in danger of being destroyed within the next 10 years, the NPS “Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States” found that 99 have already been lost forever and 234 are in poor condition.

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