

Originally printed in the [Winsted Journal](#) on February 19th, 2010

Community colleges are the largest segment of our nation's higher education system, enrolling more than 6 million students nationwide. They are an important resource to address the economic, social and health needs of our communities.

The work of the 12 public colleges that comprise the System of Connecticut Community Colleges is to be commended. Connecticut's Community College system is the only one in the nation to win U.S. Department of Labor grants aimed specifically at job creation four years in a row. Many of these colleges have successfully partnered with local businesses to create programs to train students for careers in technology, manufacturing and alternative energy.

I am especially pleased by the efforts of President Barbara Douglass and Northwestern Connecticut Community College (NCCC). NCCC and President Douglass have set an example of the true importance a community college can have in a community and a region.

Connecticut is facing the second worst nursing shortage in the nation and the shortage will be worst in Litchfield County. It is estimated Litchfield County's nursing vacancy rate is 14 percent annually, double the statewide average. Currently, there is no degree or diploma nursing program within the county.

Understanding the consequences the shortage would have on Litchfield County, President Douglass and Professor Barbara Berger along with community, private partners, local hospitals, financial institutions and foundations responded. They worked together on a capital campaign to create a nursing program. They all recognized the need for the economic and social benefits a nursing program would have in the region.

To support this effort, in December 2009 I helped secure \$350,000 in federal funding to help create the first nursing program in Litchfield County at NCCC. I was proud to celebrate this achievement with the NCCC community on Wednesday. This nursing program will single-handedly reshape the health care and economic landscape in Winsted and in the northwestern Connecticut region.

In speaking of the great possibility of community colleges and our nation's future, President Obama said, "When our nation placed our bet for the future on education, we have prospered as a result." By investing in the growth of our nation's community colleges, we will further progress our nation for the better. I look forward to sharing my other efforts to improve Connecticut's and the nation's community colleges.

John Larson is the Democratic Congressman for Connecticut's 1st District, which includes Winsted.