

ON THE JOBS TOUR

Malloy touts digital sector

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As far as job creation is concerned, Connecticut has lagged severely behind other states in the past couple of decades, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy acknowledged on Tuesday.

"Over the last 20 years, we've allowed ourselves to give away certain industries, to sit back as others took our jobs and not fight back," Malloy told a round table of local entrepreneurs at the newly formed Stamford Innovation Center in Old Town Hall. "Clearly, we're getting ready to fight back."

Since June, the governor and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Catherine Smith have toured the state to address the issue of job creation and listen to ideas for solutions from area businesses. On Tuesday, Malloy and Smith met with entrepreneurs to discuss how to foster innovation and job growth in Fairfield County.

Malloy also trumpeted the launch of the Innovation Center Tuesday, which aims to connect startup companies with investors, while creating a nurturing community for new businesses.

"Clearly what we have to do is build an environment for more

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innovators to set up shop here," Malloy said.

Seated at the table with the governor and commissioner were entrepreneurs from local startups including Synqware, a Stamford-based connectivity company, Venture-Mom, an online resource for female entrepreneurs and It's Relevant, a local media source. The majority of the companies represented are digitally based, bringing the issue of technology and education to the forefront of the discussion.

"We need the money, we need access to our potential customers, we need community support and we need a friendly tax environment," Asmau Ahmed, CEO of Color-Modules, said. "When I speak about my technology in New York City or Silicon Valley (in northern California), they get it, they get excited about it. If we're really focused on innovation here in Connecticut, I think we need that shift in our mindset. We need support systems from the state and from the investors."

Commissioner Smith spoke about the need to create a business ecosystem in the state that is both supportive of the startup and small businesses that exist in the state and attractive to those who want to settle here. The state has allocated \$15 million to be spent over the next two years on shaping an image for Connecticut as a business-friendly spot.

"We're not just looking at how to bring more tourism to the state, we're going to create programs to brand the state as a great place to grow innovative business, to start putting Connecticut literally and figuratively on the map," Smith said.

Smith and Malloy also acknowledged that creating a successful business ecosystem would take cultural change as well as legislative action. A large part of this centers around education, advancing local higher education in the areas of technology and engineering so that Connecticut can become more competitive in both producing and luring young talent.

"The hope is that we can quickly make some changes to our approach to job growth and job creation," Malloy said.