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**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Chairwoman  
Committee on Education and the Workforce Hearing:  
“Unleashing America’s Opportunities for Hiring and Employment.”  
March 28, 2023**

(As prepared for delivery)

One of the most troubling consequences of pandemic-related closures and the Left’s failing policies: The decline of America’s workforce.

The Democrats controlled the House for three years of the pandemic and its aftermath. They oversaw the greatest spending spree by any nation in world history. When inevitable economic hardship followed, the American people had questions that deserved answers from the Committee on Education and the Workforce.

What did the Democrats’ oversight look like?

In the 116th and 117th Congress, Committee Democrats did not once conduct oversight of their economic shutdowns or the implications for our workforce.

Did Democrats hold a hearing on inflation - the single greatest concern for a plurality of Americans?

Never.

How many times did Committee Democrats hold a hearing to address directly the nationwide supply chain disruption?

Zero times.

In response to the single sharpest spike of unemployment in the 21st century, the Democrat-controlled Committee chose to hold hearings in support of closing Main

Street small businesses, padding the pockets of Big Labor union bosses, and advocating for increased federal spending in pandemic giveaways. In fact, Democrats have doubled down on attempts to eliminate opportunities for workers to choose when, where, and how they work. The consequences of this job-killing agenda are preventing small business owners and entrepreneurs from putting more Americans back to work. Instead of making the workforce system more responsive to worker and employer needs, Democrats pushed one-size-fits-all Registered Apprenticeships while shuttering the Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Program.

According to a National Association of Manufacturers survey, more than 62 percent of manufacturing leaders thought the U.S. economy would officially enter a recession in 2023. In February, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) reported that expectations for better business conditions remain low. I, for one, am not shocked that the American public lost faith in Democrats to handle the economy.

You will hear arguments today from the other side that downplay the seriousness of the challenges we faced and continue to face. Charitably put, they are inaccurate.

To dispel just a few:

While the unemployment figure is low, it doesn't paint a full picture. Millions exited the workforce during the pandemic. The economy has not recovered, and workforce participation still lags behind pre-pandemic rates. All the while, too many businesses are struggling to fill the nearly 11 million open positions.

NFIB reported that inflation is the single most important problem facing its members. In June, inflation reached 9.1 percent—the highest level since December 1981. More recently, the inflation rate has slowed and is now closer to the conditions experienced in summer of 1982 and the winter of 1990—but these times are better known for their economic downturns. In short, Democrats have created conditions for future unemployment through massive spending and increased regulations.

Forcefully increasing union participation will not give this country a stronger workforce. Washington should not be in the business of picking winners and losers in our economy—whether it be through overturning every right-to-work law in the

country, eliminating independent contracting, jeopardizing franchise businesses, or rewarding union bosses with unchecked power by acquiescing to every item on their wish list.

House Republicans were given a mandate by the American people to offer an alternative vision for our economy. We will put forward solutions to reduce unnecessary regulations, control spending, offer more Americans opportunities for skills development, and remove impediments to hiring. Skills-based education is one pathway to prepare students for the job market. By increasing work-based learning opportunities and extending the Pell Grant to short-term, high-quality programs, we can help workers get the skills they need for lifelong success.

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