



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Republican Leader
Committee on Education and Labor Hearing:
“Eliminating Barriers to Employment: Opening Doors to Opportunity”
May 21, 2019**

“This hearing is supposedly about barriers to employment, not opportunities for federal spending, federal involvement, and federal power. We could use a little truth in advertising today.

It seems our colleagues on the other side have done their level best to have a hearing about employment without addressing the role of education. Or put another way, skills development. That shows two things. First, a fundamental disregard for why this committee exists to do what it does— education policy and workforce policy, in tandem, side-by-side, cause and effect. Second, it shows a tone-deafness about the current state of the American economy. We have historic job growth, historic wage growth, and an historic number of job openings. Employment opportunities abound, but the skills gap persists and grows.

Looking at individual policies outside of the role of education is not the way to approach this question of opening doors for Americans. It’s these siloed, piecemealed approaches that have gotten us here. When will we learn? The American dream was founded on the premise that individuals are free, and capable of improving their lives, of living better and climbing higher than their ancestors before them. As representatives of millions of people who still cling to these hopes, anything Congress can responsibly do to help increase opportunity for all Americans in the workforce, especially those with disadvantages, it ought to do. But history has shown us that it is not the federal government, but the innovation and initiative of individual Americans themselves, that has successfully broken down barriers.

Though in the past we seemed to agree more on what the barriers to success are and how to remedy them, today, Democrats see barriers as opportunities to increase federal power. Republicans see barriers as opportunities to enable individual empowerment.

If we really want to lift the barriers that stifle Americans trying to enter and thrive in the workforce, we need to propose remedies that reduce the skills gap and prepare individuals to fill the plethora of available, high-quality jobs in this country. It cannot be overemphasized that all education is career education. We will get nowhere in our efforts to close the skills gap and fill these millions of open jobs if we do not make postsecondary education reform the focus of our efforts. Apprenticeships. Earn and learn opportunities. Stackable credentials. A fair and full view of what postsecondary education is and should be. *This* is the key to opening doors to opportunity and prosperity, not a more reactionary federal government.

The promise of higher education is broken, and federal law perpetuates this failing system. By reforming the *Higher Education Act* to leverage employer expertise, allow for innovative ways to gain skills and stackable credentials, and encourage lifelong learning, Congress can help close the skills gap and unleash the economic potential of Americans nationwide.

Our previous efforts like *Strengthening the Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act* and WIOA provided lucrative results for the American worker by supporting his or her progress and development. These policies have asserted that the answers are closer to home than an influx of government spending and programs. We have recognized that education and workforce development are one in the same in the past, and we must do the same going forward.

As legislators working to remove the barriers to economic and employment success for all Americans, especially the disadvantaged, it's critical that we keep this approach in mind. Our success is an individual's success, and removing barriers should mean less government overreach and involvement, not more."

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