



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA), Republican Leader
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment Hearing:
“Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Labor Department’s Apprenticeship
Program”
November 20, 2019**

(As prepared for delivery)

“On the heels of National Apprenticeship week, today we will hear from the Labor Department on their apprenticeship programs, which can help energize the U.S. workforce. By supporting apprenticeships and other earn as you learn programs, we can help change the misconception that a baccalaureate degree is the only pathway to a successful life.

Thanks to pro-growth policies ushered in by Republican leadership in Congress and the White House, our economy is booming and unemployment is at historic lows. However, more than seven million jobs remain unfilled across the country.

Apprenticeships offer one of the strongest solutions to closing this skills gap and strengthening the American workforce. Nothing can prepare a student quite like on-the-job experience, and apprenticeships are a tried-and-true method to help students enter the workforce with the skills they need to succeed and achieve the American Dream. In fact, according to the Department of Labor, 94 percent of apprentices retain employment after completing an apprenticeship program and the average starting salary after completion is \$70,000.

Regrettably, a 2018 survey of U.S. employers showed that nearly half of all job creators struggle to hire employees with the right skills for the job, and for the sixth year running, skilled trade jobs continue to be the hardest positions to fill all over the world. Registered apprenticeships are one tool we can use to strengthen the workforce, but it’s important to give recognition to increasingly innovative

and growing employer-led apprenticeship programs. Employer-led apprenticeship programs account for more than 80 percent of all apprenticeship programs nationwide.

Employers know what skills their employees need to excel in the workplace, and Congress should encourage employer-led innovation in the apprenticeship space. That's why I support efforts to cut the regulatory red tape that prevents so many employers from revolutionizing the way we integrate the education system with the workforce development system.

Thanks to the Trump administration, the Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion was created to address this very issue. Among other suggestions, the final report of the task force recommended reducing the regulatory burden faced by businesses, allowing them to be flexible in their program requirements to meet the varying needs of different industries. I applaud the Trump Administration for this commendable effort to close our widening skills gap with commonsense solutions.

Instead of pursuing a productive dialogue today about apprenticeship programs, many of my Democratic colleagues will spend their time talking about recent reports of misappropriated funds. I want to first and foremost go on the record that Congress must ensure that hard-earned taxpayer dollars are used efficiently and effectively. I look forward to hearing from the Department about the steps they have taken to conduct a thorough review of its accounts. I know that we would all like to be reassured that the Department has been able to correct the issues discovered in that review so that they will not be repeated.

This committee has a responsibility to work towards solutions that will increase access to career-changing opportunities. Workforce programs like apprenticeships will aid in closing the skills gap and putting more Americans to work. I look forward to hearing from today's witness and learning more about the innovative ways that we can help provide students with skills-based education and in-demand jobs through apprenticeship programs.”

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