



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:
“Reauthorizing the National Apprenticeship Act: Strengthening and Growing
Apprenticeships for the 21st Century”
March 4, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Today we are here to discuss reform of the *National Apprenticeship Act*, an important tool in our efforts to promote and strengthen apprenticeships so American workers are better prepared to compete in today’s economy.

I’d like to thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for working with us to hold today’s hearing. The more we combat the misconception that a baccalaureate degree is the only viable pathway to a good job the more we can better prepare future workers for a successful life. For too long, there has been a stigma surrounding skills-based education. Today’s hearing is an opportunity to highlight and recognize that on-the-job learning programs are a proven method of setting students up for success.

As we all know, there is a growing interest in apprenticeships and other earn-and-learn opportunities across the world, and for good reason. Employers of all sizes are increasingly recognizing the critical role that apprenticeships play in the development of a qualified workforce. However, as our economy continues to thrive under tax reform and deregulation efforts, we face a serious skills gap. Currently, more than seven million jobs remain unfilled.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the number of job openings in the United States exceeds the number of job seekers nationwide. This has increased

the demand for skilled workers. Yet, 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.

Apprenticeship programs offer one of the strongest solutions and pathways to filling these positions, closing this skills gap, and strengthening the American workforce, but don't just take my word for it. 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.

The Trump administration has long recognized the benefits and importance of these programs and acted on behalf of our nation's students and workers. In July of 2018, President Trump signed an Executive Order on workforce development, in which companies around the country signed a pledge to expand apprenticeship opportunities and educate 3.8 million workers over the next five years.

It is abundantly clear that apprenticeship programs are proven to be effective. We must continue our work to integrate the education community with the workforce, so that classrooms and on-the-job development work hand in hand. We need to adapt in order to propel all students to success in a rapidly evolving economy.

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 by building talent pipelines and putting more Americans to work.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their testimony today. I'm looking forward to having a discussion about how we can improve the recently released discussion draft to make the registered apprenticeship system work better for students, families, and employers so we can continue to promote apprenticeships to build our workforce and improve our country."

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