



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Republican Leader
Committee on Education and Labor
Markup of H.R. 8294, *National Apprenticeship Act of 2020*
September 24, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

“American innovation is no accident. It must be cultivated by education in all its forms. Yet, too many Americans believe that the only pathway to a successful career lies solely on a college campus and in a baccalaureate degree. This is simply not the case. For many Americans, the apprenticeship model has served as a door to opportunity and economic prosperity.

Our nation faces a growing skills gap that has been compounded by COVID-19. Millions of workers will need reskilling due to pandemic-related job loss and displacement. We must look at the nexus between education and the American workforce more closely than ever.

Apprenticeships offer one of the strongest solutions to strengthen the American workforce and close our nation’s skills gap. In recent years we’ve seen interest for apprenticeships surge as more small businesses and other employers are recognizing the critical role they play in the development of a skilled, 21st century workforce.

President Trump has taken apprenticeship opportunities to new heights by issuing an executive order that established the National Council for the American Worker. This council seeks to bring more Americans into the workforce by strengthening skills-based hiring and learning. Since the signing of the executive order, more than 430 companies and organizations have signed the Pledge to America’s Workers, contributing to over 16 million new education and on-the-job learning opportunities for American students and workers.

We have an opportunity to build on this work through the bill before us today. Republicans and Democrats agree on the critical role that expanded apprenticeship opportunities could play in addressing our nation's workforce needs and preparing workers for meaningful, well-paying careers. I want to thank Chairman Scott and the sponsor of the legislation, Ms. Davis, for engaging in bipartisan negotiations. Those negotiations resulted in a bill that was very nearly bipartisan.

Unfortunately, we find ourselves at a familiar impasse. Republicans agree that the traditional registered apprenticeship system is an important part of our nation's workforce development infrastructure, and that reforms to that system could greatly expand its positive impact on workers and employers. However, we do not agree that the traditional registered apprenticeship system that has existed since the Great Depression should be the only way for the federal government to support apprenticeships and that this system is the only model of work-based learning that can exist within the *National Apprenticeship Act*. If we really want to expand apprenticeship opportunities, it is important this update provides some leeway to allow for opportunities to develop.

Employers know best what skills their employees require to excel in the workplace. That is why my Republican colleagues and I believe Congress should encourage employer-led innovation in the apprenticeship space.

Unfortunately, Committee Democrats fail to recognize the advantages of this concept and they are moving forward with H.R. 8294, the *National Apprenticeship Act of 2020*. This partisan bill seeks to enshrine the existing approach to apprenticeships as the only appropriate approach to apprenticeships.

In fiscal year 2019, 252,000 individuals entered apprenticeships and only 81,000 graduated from the registered system. Clearly, there is room to improve the registered system and make space for employer-led innovation.

My Republican colleagues and I encourage employers to innovate and develop apprenticeship programs that meet the unique needs of the current workplace. Employers are struggling enough with the challenges presented by COVID-19. We should be doing all we can to expand employers' opportunities to address the needs of their current and prospective workers through an all of the above approach to apprenticeships, rather than closing potential pathways to work.

This committee has a responsibility to work towards solutions that will increase access to career-changing opportunities. We should be advancing legislation that builds on the successful efforts of businesses that allow them to grow their own apprenticeship programs, whether those programs are registered or not.

Workforce programs like apprenticeships will aid in closing the skills gap and put more Americans to work, but only if employees and job creators are given the flexibility to innovate and develop high-quality earn-and-learn programs without overreach from Washington.

I urge my colleagues to return to the negotiating table so we can finish the work we started. Together, we can strengthen the registered apprenticeship system and empower employers to unleash the entrepreneurial ingenuity of the American workforce. I yield back.”

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