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House of Representatives

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Ranking Member Cori Bush

Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs

Hearing on “The Power of Apprenticeships: Faster, Better Paths to Prosperous Jobs and Less Waste in Higher Education”

October 25, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

St. Louis and I are here to discuss the critical pathways that apprenticeships work to provide well-paying jobs in high-skilled, in-demand industries.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018 there were nearly 600,000 active apprentices in more than 23,000 registered apprenticeship programs across the country. For industries like the healthcare field, these job opportunities fill crucial staffing gaps left in the wake of the pandemic.

According to reporting in the Wall Street Journal, the number of apprenticeships has increased by about 50% over the past decade. Major U.S. companies have created apprentice programs to train the next generation of skilled employees, including companies like JP Morgan and Delta Airlines.

Research shows that completion of an apprenticeship means more than just a job—it means embarking on a career that can enable dedicated workers to care for their families without having to work three jobs. It also means acquiring skills that can provide a ladder into financial stability, rather than a cycle of inescapable debt.

Today, I’m extremely proud to welcome to the Subcommittee Ms. Apryl Gladney, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Resources Recruitment and Employee Relations at Washington University in St. Louis—proudly located in Missouri’s First Congressional District.

Ms. Gladney will share how Washington University has created an innovative medical apprenticeship program that bolsters the diversity of the healthcare industry, one student at a time. As a nurse, I know firsthand how important it is for our healthcare professionals to be as diverse as our communities, particularly during a time of historic challenges in the medical and nursing fields.

To foster these types of apprentice programs and success stories, increasing federal support is vital. Obtaining a higher education has never been more expensive, yet necessary for career development and financial stability. The astronomical cost of higher education in our country is a disgrace and it should be debt free. In addition to eliminating high tuition that leads to student debt, our communities also deserve a variety of pathways that lead to gainful employment and diversify our workforce.

For fiscal year 2024, Congress authorized more than \$1.3 billion for the Perkins program, which provides support to career and technical education programs—and it should be fully funded.

Similarly, through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Congress has appropriated billions to support training and adult literacy programs—and more federal funding is needed to support an increasingly diverse workforce.

My Republican colleagues, however, have proposed steep cuts to these programs that, if enacted, will devastate job training and apprenticeship programs in communities like mine across our country.

For example, Republicans' draft Labor-H appropriations bill for fiscal year '24 sought to eliminate funding for adult and youth job training programs under WIOA—which would cut off access for more than 400,000 adults and youths.

Finally, I note that there are many post-secondary educational options available for students, but not all of them are accessible for everyone. We want all options to be accessible to all students. I join my Democratic colleagues in our commitment that financial need should not stand in a student's way of accessing the educational opportunity that is right for them—whether that's an apprenticeship, a community college, or a four-year degree.

I deeply appreciate Washington University's efforts to remove barriers that can prevent students from attending that prestigious institution, and I applaud the Biden-Harris Administration for their efforts to relieve the crushing weight of student debt in this nation.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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