

OPPORTUNITY
AMERICA



Jobs and Careers Coalition

May 20, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
HELP Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
HELP Committee
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx,

We write on behalf of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition to express our appreciation for new thinking on both sides of the aisle about how to address the nation's workforce needs as we recover and rebuild in the wake of the global pandemic.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is a Washington-based business group focused on career education and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries that have been experiencing skills mismatches and worker shortages – IT, manufacturing, construction, retail and hospitality, among others.

We know firsthand from the business owners we represent: workforce development will be an essential ingredient of the coming economic recovery.

Millions of Americans are going to need short, job-focused upskilling or reskilling before they can return to work productively in their current jobs or re-enter the labor market after a period of unemployment.

Across the economy, workers in every setting – on farms, in factories, hotels, restaurants, shops, schools, personal service salons, professional offices and entertainment venues – will need to learn new safety protocols to protect themselves and others against the risk of infection.

Workers in other fields will need new skills to keep up with changing technology. HVAC workers in hotels and hospitals will need to learn the latest HEPA technology so they can install and maintain high-efficiency air filters. In construction, skilled tradesmen used to working on open-air building sites will need to adjust to a post-Covid industry that relies increasingly on prefabricated modules produced in the relatively hygienic environment of a manufacturing plant.

Still other workers will need more extensive reskilling to help them move from a struggling sector to an industry where demand is more robust. Former airline employees with no prospect of quick re-employment may look for fast, job-focused training in, say, IT skills or online customer service management. From cloud computing technicians to diesel mechanics, many occupations will continue to see labor shortages, and unemployed workers from other industries can be reskilled to fill them.

The list goes on and on – and these are just the examples we can imagine now. There will be countless variations on the theme as new technology and accelerated innovation transform the economy and the labor market adjusts.

One thing is certain: the vast national upskilling effort that’s needed will require additional spending and new flexibility in how federal funding is spent on career education and workforce development.

Our coalition supports fiscally responsible investment with outcomes-based performance metrics and other guardrails to ensure that dollars go to effective, well-vetted programs aligned with in-demand jobs.

Among the options our coalition hopes Congress will consider:

- Additional Perkins Career and Technical Education funding
- More flexibility in how states can spend Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act dollars, including on hard-hit sectors and to incentivize employers to offer in-house upskilling
- Pell Grants for learners in short, job-focused programs at Title IV-eligible institutions that lead to industry-recognized credentials
- More flexibility for Title IV-eligible institutions seeking to partner with noncollege providers to offer in-demand upskilling
- More flexibility for competency-based reskilling options
- Personal reemployment accounts that laid-off workers who return to work in a timely fashion can spend on reskilling programs of their choice
- Increased funding for apprenticeship – both registered apprenticeships and industry-recognized programs
- Outcomes-based metrics to ensure that funding goes toward upskilling that is aligned with in-demand jobs and results in increased job placements

Our coalition is encouraged by the attention devoted to workforce issues in the emergency supplemental measure that moved in the House in mid-May. But we encourage Congress to craft a package that draws on the best thinking on both sides of the aisle.

The workforce challenge ahead will require an unprecedented national effort: new ideas, new delivery models, new kinds of cooperation, new agility and flexibility from a broad array of workforce education providers. Our coalition looks forward to working with Congress as it provides for and incentivizes the essential upskilling that will be needed as the nation rebuilds for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Associated Builders and Contractors
American Hotel & Lodging Association
American Supply Association
Associated Equipment Distributors
Associated General Contractors of America
Association of Equipment Manufacturers
Association of Nutrition & Foodservice Professionals
Automotive Service Excellence Education Foundation
Construction Industry Round Table
Heavy Construction Contractors Association
Independent Electrical Contractors
International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials
International Code Council
International Franchise Association
National Asphalt Pavement Association
National Association of Home Builders
National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)
National Ready Mixed Concrete Association
National Roofing Contractors Association
National Stone, Sand and Gravel Association
Opportunity America
Partnership of Air-Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration Accreditation

Partnership for New York City
Portland Cement Association

Gaylor Electric, Inc.

IBM

Lupson and Associates, LLC

OEM Fabricators, Inc.

Realityworks, Inc.

Shapiro & Duncan, Inc.

Worley

Universal Technical Institute

CC: Senate Committee on Appropriations

House Committee on Appropriations