

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

"Unleashing America's Workforce and Strengthening Our Economy"

Wednesday, February 26, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to associate this side with your remarks about Shelia Havenner. She has, for the past eleven years, worked tirelessly for the Committee and has worked under Democratic and Republican leadership, handling a range of information and technology issues flawlessly. Sheila, thank you for your service, and I look forward to your next step.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

Today's full committee hearing—the first labor-related one of the 119th Congress—comes just as President Trump completed his first month in his second term. It's important to be clear about the economy and labor market that President Trump and the Congressional Republicans inherited, as they are now completely in charge of the federal government.

During the previous four years, during the Biden Administration, the economy created 16.2 million jobs, breaking the record for jobs created for any single presidential term. And in fact, Ronald Reagan, in eight years, was the highest job creator for Republicans, creating 16.1 million jobs. So, President Biden created more jobs than any Republican president in history, whether they served four or eight years.

This chart shows the Presidents' job creation — the average monthly job changes by administration. Joe Biden leads the pack, and Donald Trump has the worst job performance in about 100 years.

The unemployment rate fell from 6.4 percent in January 2021 to 4 percent in January 2025. The unemployment rate has been at or below 4.2 percent since November 2021— and, as Dr. Shierholz notes in her excellent testimony, the last time the United States saw unemployment this low was about half a century ago.

For those of us who are interested in fiscal responsibility, I will remind people that every Democratic President since Kennedy has left office with a better deficit situation than they inherited, and every Republican President since Nixon has left their Democratic successors with a worse deficit situation than they inherited— all without exception.

President Biden was the first President on record not to have a single month of seasonally adjusted job loss. At the same time, between 2019 and 2023, low-wage workers experienced historically fast real wage growth. The labor force participation for prime-age workers reached the highest level in more than 20 years, and in 2023, roughly 22 percent of people with a disability were employed—the highest recorded ratio since comparable data was first collected in 2008.

This remarkable progress came as our country emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, and that progress was not inevitable. It was the result of policy choices made by Congressional Democrats to ensure that workers were prioritized and benefited from public investments.

For example:

- With the multiemployer pension system on the brink of collapse, Democrats saved the pensions of more than 1.3 million retirees, protecting nearly 10,000 businesses already to date. Regrettably, not one Republican voted to save the pensions of these 1.3 million retirees.
- Democrats also capped out-of-pocket insulin costs for Medicare at \$35 a month. Again, not a single Republican voted for this landmark reform.

Unfortunately, the progress we worked so hard to achieve during the last four years and the economic gains we made as a nation— while other countries struggled to overcome global inflation— are at risk.

How can we be confident that the Trump Administration and Congressional Republicans, who— again— are in complete control of the federal government, President, House, and Senate, will be effective stewards of the strong economy that they have inherited?

But there is evidence that they will not be good stewards.

It's been a little over a month, and so far, the second Trump Administration has been filled with the same nonstop chaos, confusion, and unprecedented— and in some cases illegal— actions that characterized his first term. So far, President Trump has:

- Rescinded the landmark Executive Order 11246 from the 1960s that protects federal contract workers and job applicants from unlawful discrimination,
- Illegally fired Inspectors General at the Labor Department and several other agencies, who are charged with rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse,
- Illegally fired Gwynne Wilcox, the first Black woman to serve on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), leaving the NLRB without a quorum to function and issue decisions and
- Fired two EEOC Commissioners, Charlotte Burrows and Jocelyn Samuels, who were in the middle of their terms. This has never happened in the agency's 60-year history, leaving the EEOC without a quorum to address claims of illegal workplace discrimination.

President Trump also allowed unelected billionaire Elon Musk and his DOGE team to invade the Labor Department and apparently access sensitive data. While the full extent of DOGE's intrusion into the Department's systems is unknown, the fact is that they may have access to our constituents' personal or private data as well as case files on active criminal and civil investigations— including ones that may relate to Elon Musk's own companies. I've asked if this access includes files on investigations that include the name of confidential witnesses or whistleblowers, whether or not it includes access to sensitive statistical information like job numbers before they become public, access to his competitor's bids so he'll know how to bid, and Mr. Chairman, we have not received any answers.

We're now hearing about abrupt firings of civil servants in at least six Labor Department agencies, including the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), even though staffing disruptions at MSHA were among the factors that led to the Upper Big Branch Mine disasters that killed 29 miners 15 years ago this April.

This is outrageous, and my Democratic colleagues and I have been demanding answers. Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to enter several oversight letters into the record that have been asking these questions.

Mr. Chairman, I invite you to join our efforts to ask Elon Musk and DOGE questions about what they are doing so that we can get some sense of what they have access to, why they need access to it, and what they are doing with that information. I would hope that you will join us, and our staff will be in contact with your staff to see what we can do – not do anything but just ask questions to see what they are doing.

Finally, I note that this hearing about “unleashing America’s workforce.” It comes the same week that House Republicans passed a budget resolution that would give trillions of dollars of tax cuts to billionaires and corporations at the expense of American workers and families.

Specifically, the budget resolution directs our Committee to come up with at least \$330 billion in savings. This means that, in the coming weeks, the Republicans on this Committee are likely to massively cut critical student loan programs, other educational programs, school meal programs for our kids, and other kinds of programs in the health and labor areas, all to finance a \$4.5 trillion tax cut for the wealthy. The consequences of these cuts will hurt our workforce, harm the public, and threaten our economy.

Just as smart, sensible, pro-worker policies helped establish a strong economy over the past four years, reckless and fiscally irresponsible policies will undo that progress. I say fiscally responsible because, after all the mean-spirited cuts and tax cuts for the wealthy, we end up with a deficit that is worse than the one we have now. So, I would hope that we can do better.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.