

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

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

*"Building an AI Ready America: Strengthening Employer-Led Training"*

Wednesday, March 4, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank our witnesses [who are here] with us today.

A strong workforce development system can provide our workers with the skills they need to succeed, helping employers find the required talent, and positioning our nation for future economic growth. But we know, we have not been investing in our system for quite some time, and as a result, significant gaps persist.

The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*, or WIOA, was a landmark step forward when it was enacted in 2014. It was a bipartisan success that sought to streamline the complex web of workforce programs and improve accountability for our workforce systems.

However, today, many workers and job seekers are struggling in an increasingly unaffordable economy. Many Americans are looking to further develop their skills and seek new opportunities. And our workforce system must ensure that every worker—even those without a bachelor's degree—can access good-paying jobs and gain the skills required to thrive in today's economy.

Last Congress, our Committee worked in a bipartisan manner to address the gaps in our workforce development system and successfully led and then eventually reached a bipartisan, bicameral agreement entitled *A Stronger Workforce for America Act*.

This monumental agreement updated WIOA to increase skills development, strengthen the connection between employers and the workforce system, and put more Americans on a path to success. It included important policy victories for both sides of the aisle, including skills-based hiring measures, youth apprenticeship grants, and individual training accounts. It included several priorities initiated by the Chairman, the gentleman from Utah, including a pilot grant for five states to innovate with flexible funds, which was modeled after his state's workforce system, the creation of new credential repositories in every state, and increased access and accountability for Job Corps.

*A Stronger Workforce for America Act* was a testament to how Congress could put political differences aside to stand up for working Americans. It's a rare achievement when Representative Foxx and Senator Sanders are fighting for the same legislation. Unfortunately, when this legislation was on the cusp of being signed into law, Speaker Johnson abruptly removed it from an end-of-year must-pass funding bill after Elon Musk and his allies launched a social media campaign and torpedoed it.

We are now over a year into the 119th Congress, and we have failed to bring the bill up for consideration in its original form. Instead of cementing a win for our workforce and the American people, regrettably, all signs point to Committee Republicans now going to needless extremes and going in a partisan direction when it comes to

reauthorizing WIOA, abandoning this bipartisan legislation – with the potential to go as far as prioritizing President Trump’s attempts to dismantle the Department of Education, by moving Adult Education programs from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor.

That would be a big mistake, and we are fortunate to have an expert witness here today – Mr. Parton – who administered WIOA programs during his time at the Department of Labor. He can speak with authority on why it would be a big mistake to move adult education to the Department of Labor. We should listen to him. The good news is that it’s not too late for Committee Republicans to avoid this mistake.

It’s not too late for Committee Republicans to show that this Committee refuses to put ideology ahead of what’s best for the country’s workforce development system and those workers and employers in our districts who rely on it.

It’s not too late for Committee Republicans to take the path that Committee Democrats believed we should have taken over a year ago.

It’s not too late to advance *A Stronger Workforce for America* and to renew our commitment to making it law.

It’s not too late to do that – but it’s up to our Republican friends to decide what comes next.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.