

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Alma S. Adams (NC-12)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

"Workforce Rewired: Modern Apprenticeships for a Modern Economy"

Wednesday, June 24, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

Right now, many Americans are facing an economy that just is not working for them. President Trump and Congressional Republicans' reckless economic policies are forcing working families to do more with less. Americans are struggling to afford housing, groceries, and gas. According to a recent Gallup poll, less than half of Americans can afford health care. Americans are struggling to keep their heads above water.

As the cost of living continues to rise, we must ensure that every worker can access a good-paying job and gain the skills required to thrive in today's economy. Registered Apprenticeships are one of the best models of job training that we have to ensure the workers' economic security. Each year, hundreds of thousands of workers complete a Registered Apprenticeship program and earn money while learning in-demand skills and receive nationally recognized credentials that lead to rewarding careers. They also provide employers with a pipeline of talented employees. Registered Apprenticeships are so successful that 9 out of 10 apprentices continue to be employed upon completing their program and earn an average starting wage of approximately \$80,000 a year.

Registered Apprenticeships are the gold standard of workforce training because of their high-quality program standards. These quality standards not only ensure that apprentices build valuable skills while earning a salary and benefits, but also that they receive a credential that is valued in the labor market and recognized by employers across the country. Without these standards, workers can become vulnerable to predatory, ineffective programs.

We are fortunate to have John Ladd as one of our witnesses this morning. Mr. Ladd ran the Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship across four presidential administrations – both Republican and Democratic. There's nobody better to tell us about the benefits and the potential of Registered Apprenticeships. And as Mr. Ladd notes in his thoughtful testimony, the number of apprentices doubled since 2014 – but we have more work to do to continue this growth and expand opportunities for women and other populations that remain statistically underrepresented in Registered Apprenticeship programs.

Last year, President Trump issued an executive order directing the Labor Department to deliver a plan to reach and surpass one million new active apprentices. Subcommittee Democrats and I welcome partnership and bipartisan support for Registered Apprenticeships, but rhetoric should match reality. And with this Administration and Congressional Republicans, what they say and what they do are hardly ever the same.

In early 2025, Elon Musk's DOGE made a huge mess and spurred an exodus of staff at the Labor Department, likely including some of the same folks who would have worked on the President's apprenticeship executive order.

The Trump Administration needlessly paused or cancelled millions of dollars in grants for apprenticeship programs and research. A North Carolina-based non-profit that offers pre-apprenticeship training to women and underemployed demographics had its grant cancelled – as did [Reach] University, whose President, Mr. Ross, is testifying today.

The Trump Administration's recent budgets proposed consolidating workforce development programs, and House Republicans' recent spending bill only includes a slight increase for apprenticeships. This is not a blueprint to reach 1 million apprentices.

The Trump Administration issued guidance loosening requirements that could water down quality standards in the apprenticeship program. Last month, Congresswoman Bonamici and I spearheaded a letter to the Acting Labor Secretary expressing concerns about this guidance. I ask unanimous consent, Mr. Chairman, to enter our letter into the record.

And finally, Mr. Chairman, some Republicans who claim to love Registered Apprenticeships are the same folks who never miss a chance to attack the labor movement, which is a key driver and funder of Registered Apprenticeships. That does not make much sense.

Subcommittee Democrats and I believe we shouldn't just increase the number of apprentices *to* one million. We should be increasing the number *by* one million. That is why we have supported billions, not millions, in new funding to increase access to Registered Apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships, and pre-apprenticeships. And this is why we continue to stand with the labor movement, which continues to do so much important work and innovation in this policy area, among others.

I look forward to today's discussion and yield back the balance of my time, Mr. Chairman.