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U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment

Hearing: "Scaling Up Apprenticeships: Building on the Success of International Apprenticeship Models"

Testimony of Mr. Simon Marti, Ph.D.

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Good morning, I want to thank Subcommittee Chairwoman Susan Davis, Ranking Member Lloyd Smucker, and the other Members of the House Committee on Education and Labor for this invitation and for the opportunity to testify about Switzerland's apprenticeship model.

My name is Simon Marti and I am the Head of Office of SwissCore, the Swiss Contact Office for European Research, Innovation and Education in Brussels. Until only a month ago, I was heading the Science and Education Office here at the Swiss Embassy to the United States, where I was closely involved in the Swiss-American cooperation on apprenticeship. The Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation has asked me to represent them in this hearing today. It is a pleasure to be back in Washington.

Apprenticeships are the most important upper-secondary educational pathway in Switzerland: Around two-thirds of our youth start a three- or four-year apprenticeship program at age 16, after having finished compulsory education. They can choose from roughly 230 different occupations, which cover all sectors of our economy.

Apprenticeships are comprehensive dual pathways, which include an educational part of typically one or two days per week at a vocational school, and a practical part, usually with a private or public employer during the remaining three or four days each week. Apprentices do not have to pay tuition. The employer pays them a small salary - thus, they earn while they learn.

I would like to highlight three key features of our apprenticeship model that contribute to its success: It only works so smoothly because the involved actors work closely together in a **public-private partnership**.

The employers play an important role: Over one third of all Swiss companies that are able to train apprentices choose to do so. They hire young apprentices and offer them the opportunity to learn in actual work streams – supported by an instructor. Furthermore, the employers – via their professional organizations – are playing an important role in designing apprenticeship programs and updating them on a regular basis.

The cantons, which have roughly the same role and autonomy as States do in this country, are providing the vocational schools and career counselling. They also supervise the apprenticeship programs in their jurisdiction.

Federal legislation guarantees nationwide portability of the different degrees. The federal government supervises the functioning of the system and supports its further development by working with the cantons and professional organizations to adapt it for the future.

This division of labor reflects how the system is funded: We invest every year more than one percent of our GDP, or 9 billion dollars, into our apprenticeship system. About 60 percent are contributed by the employers, 30 percent by the cantons and 10 percent by the federal government.

Although the employers contribute the most, they see a positive financial return of investment in terms of costs and benefits. Besides, young and inventive students are stimulating for the companies and contribute to their innovation capabilities.

A second success factor is that the apprenticeship system is an integral part of our **permeable** education system: You can start out on an apprenticeship pathway and – if you have the aptitude and interest to do so – move on to university or further professional certification. There are no dead-ends in the system, multiple options are open at all levels of education. Lifelong learning is a reality in Switzerland.

Young students and their parents typically perceive apprenticeships as strong foundations for a promising career or for the continuation of one's educational pathway. The permeability of the Swiss education system also makes it easier for our workforce to adapt to new developments on the labor market and their personal interests.

Finally, apprenticeships are **labor market oriented**: Apprentices learn to work with the latest tools and equipment that a school could not typically afford but a company needs in order to compete in the free market. Furthermore, when an employer is offering an apprenticeship position, it also means that this occupation is relevant in the labor market and there are typically job opportunities once the apprentice graduates.

The Swiss apprenticeship system has many positive outcomes. It offers young people a meaningful perspective, prepares them to enter the labor market right after graduating from an apprenticeship program and earning a good salary already at age nineteen or in their early twenties. This contributes to a low youth unemployment and offers our economy and society the skilled workforce that is necessary to compete in international markets and to flourish.

Chairwoman Davis, Ranking Member Smucker, Members of the Committee on Education and Labor, I thank you for your attention.

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