



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

## Opening Statement of Chairman Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

*Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Labor*

Hybrid Hearing

June 14, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

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Today, we are meeting to discuss the Department of Labor's budget request for Fiscal Year 2023.

Secretary Walsh, thank you for being with us today. We look forward to hearing your vision to help all workers and their families succeed in our economy.

I want to begin by reflecting on how far we have come in our economic recovery during the Biden-Harris Administration.

Two years ago, in May of 2020, our nation's unemployment rate was 13.2 percent. By May of 2021, the unemployment rate had fallen to 5.8 percent—largely thanks to Congressional Democrats' and President Biden's American Rescue Plan. And, by last month, it had fallen to 3.6 percent. Since President Biden took office in January 2021, the economy has added nearly 8.7 million jobs. In fact, 2021 saw the largest job growth in modern history.

This historic recovery was not by happenstance. It is directly connected to President Biden's and Congressional Democrats' leadership.

Thanks to the comprehensive efforts to mitigate COVID-19 and the American Rescue Plan, 221 million Americans have been fully vaccinated, allowing workers to return to safer workplaces.

Also, through the American Rescue Plan, Congressional Democrats saved more than one million retirees' hard-earned pensions through the multiemployer pension fund. Had we not acted, pensions would have failed; workers and retirees—from truckers to bricklayers—would have lost nearly everything they worked to save; and many participating employers would have been forced to close or cut jobs.

While these steps are significant, our progress has *not* been limited to just rebounding from the pandemic. I am pleased to see that the Administration shares Committee Democrats' commitment to advancing workers' rights and preparing workers to compete in the modern economy.

Last September, the Administration took a critical step to put money back into workers' pockets by increasing the federal minimum wage for federal contract and subcontract workers. As a result, nearly 400,000 low-wage workers received a much-needed raise.

Last April, President Biden signed an Executive Order to create a task force dedicated to promoting worker organizing and collective bargaining. The task force's recommendations, coupled with increased investments in

the Department's subagencies, will help ensure all workers can be empowered to build a better life for themselves and their families.

Moreover, the Department's Good Jobs Initiative and the budget's sizeable increase in workforce development programs will help ensure that businesses can fill job openings with qualified candidates.

Simply put, as evidenced by the past year-and-a-half of progress and the President's budget request, the Biden-Harris Administration is the most pro-worker Administration in history.

However, I recognize that our economic progress is clouded by the rising costs of everyday goods that are impacting people around the world.

I applaud the President for communicating a clear, responsible plan to address global inflation. Similarly, House Democrats continue to advance legislation that would help bring down costs for America's workers and families.

For example, in March, the House passed legislation that would cap out-of-pocket insurance costs for insulin users to \$35 per month—slashing the average cost for patients nearly in half, and for many it's a much more significant reduction.

Regrettably, this was not unanimous and the overwhelming majority of House Republicans opposed it.

Last month, the House passed legislation that would help lower costs for consumers at the gas pump by putting an end to price gouging.

*Every House Republican opposed that legislation.*

This week, the House is expected to consider legislation to lower food costs in the grocery aisle by strengthening the food supply chain and ensuring robust competition in the meat and poultry sectors.

One of the most important steps Congress can take to ease global inflation and strengthen our supply chains is for the House and Senate to reach an agreement on a bipartisan innovation bill that retains the key worker provisions in the House-passed *COMPETES Act*.

I anticipate we may hear some comments from my colleagues on the other side about rising costs. We share those concerns and that is why we have been advancing the responsible bills I mentioned—and others—to lower costs for working people.

But merely identifying a problem and levying criticism without also offering credible solutions is not constructive—and it certainly doesn't constitute a plan. Any comment from Republicans about global inflation should be met with one simple question: what's their plan to address it?

The bottom line is, as lawmakers, we must continue to improve the lives of workers and their families. Over the past year-and-a-half, Congressional Democrats have done exactly that, leading to one of the strongest economic recoveries in history. Businesses are open; the job market is booming; wages are rising; pensions have been saved; and workers are safer on the job. I am confident that, together, we can work to address the challenges facing families and continue to build an economy where everyone can succeed.

So, thank you, Secretary Walsh, for your time and I look forward to our discussion.