

Opening Statement of Congresswoman Susan Davis
Higher Education and Workforce Development (HEWD) Subcommittee Hearing
“Expanding Options for Employers and Workers Through Earn-and-Learn
Opportunities”
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2175 Rayburn

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I am thrilled that we are here today to discuss successful earn-and-learn programs. As this Committee looks to help build a highly skilled workforce and close the skills gap that we so often hear about, we must look at effective models to expand. We know that these models are not new. In fact, registered apprenticeships have been training students for quality, high-paying jobs for decades.

Programs like The Apprentice School, which we’ll hear from today, integrate on-the-job training with related classroom instruction. They also work with local community colleges to build and develop curriculum that allows apprentices to have stackable, transferable credentials and allow them to transition into other higher education pathways. These programs also work to educate teachers, families and young people about the benefits of registered apprenticeships.

I am interested in hearing how we can build on the successes of these programs to make registered apprenticeships more exciting for young people. We often hear from students that they’re looking for more flexible education options to meet their busy schedules. We need to answer this call and make quality apprenticeships a viable option for all students.

Apprenticeships must be prestigious enough to attract students who seek the most challenging and aspirational programs. Parents want to know that their children are receiving a quality education that will yield a widely recognized credential.

As we'll hear today, apprenticeships are not the only successful earn and learn model. However, if taxpayers are going to invest in these important programs, there must be accountability for students and their families.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on this committee to expand upon the registration process for apprenticeships, while ensuring that protections remain in place for students. If our only goal is to dismantle protections for students, then we are doing them a great disservice.

I also believe that we can make apprenticeships more appealing by expanding them beyond the traditional trades. We'd like to see companies build upon the phenomenal work that the building trades have done to open up apprenticeships in new industries.

Just this year Amazon announced it was starting a registered apprenticeship program for veterans in its IT cloud computing space. And Microsoft has recently announced one as well. This, I believe, is the key to how we expand apprenticeships in the US.

By recognizing and rewarding companies who develop successful programs, we can incentivize more industries to expand apprenticeships across the country.

And we know that we have to engage with all of our partners in this effort. Whether it is learning from the important work that unions have done in this space, asking businesses to continue engaging with the Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeships, or looking to schools and nonprofit organizations to develop meaningful curriculum for apprentices, we know that this must be a collaborative process.

Last week, in a disappointing maneuver, the Labor, Health and Human Services bill eliminated federal dollars for apprenticeship programs and called on the authorizers to pass an authorization bill. These dollars in the past were used to promote diversity and support intermediaries so that small businesses can benefit from apprenticeships.

If that's the case, let's give the appropriators clarity in the form of an authorization. I know that Ranking Member Scott, myself, and most of the Democrats on this committee support Rep. Pocan's LEARNs act and are willing to have a markup on it tomorrow, if the Chair would schedule it.

I know through my conversations with Members of this Committee that apprenticeships have great support. I hope we can come together in a bipartisan manner to promote registered apprenticeship programs.