

SKILLS FOR GOOD JOBS

AGENDA

2019

Steps Congress and the Administration
Can Take to Stand Behind America's
Greatest Asset: **ITS PEOPLE**



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

As the U.S. economy continues to grow, investments in education and training have never been more important — helping workers obtain the skills and credentials they need to take advantage of emerging job openings, while helping U.S. businesses maintain their competitive edge. But we're in danger of falling behind, particularly with respect to middle-skill jobs that require more than a high school diploma but not a four-year degree. While 53 percent of all jobs in today's labor market are middle skill, only 43 percent of U.S. workers are trained at this level, meaning that key industries are losing out on economic opportunities — and U.S. workers are being held back from career pathways that lead to good wages.

In 2018, Congress worked on a bipartisan basis to update the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, expand access to training for SNAP recipients under the Farm Bill, and increase funding for adult education, apprenticeship, and other workforce investments. But we can't stop there. Congress and the Trump Administration must work together in 2019 to build on these successes and support broadly shared prosperity. National Skills Coalition's 2019 Skills for Good Jobs Agenda identifies key steps federal policymakers can take this year to ensure that all workers and all industries have the skills to compete and prosper.

Don't just talk about workers as America's greatest asset, invest in them.

ACTION: *Increase funding for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) workforce and adult education grants and state career and technical education grants to at least FY2020 authorized levels.*

According to the White House Council of Economic Advisors, U.S. investments in skills now lag behind virtually all other developed economies, and Congress has made it worse by slashing funds for state job training grants by 40 percent since 2001. We can't compete in a global economy if we aren't willing to make the necessary investments in our workers and businesses.

Transform our nation's postsecondary education system into an engine for economic opportunity and growth.

Eliminate the bias against working people who want in-demand credentials.

ACTION: *Pass the JOBS Act so that America's workers can use federal Pell grants to earn short-term credentials sought by local employers.*

Nearly one million Americans seeking better jobs pursue short-term credentials, offered through community and technical colleges and other institutions. These programs can increase earnings by 30 percent or more compared to a high school diploma. In some fields, the average earnings of those with in-demand credentials can exceed the average earnings of those with a four-year degree.



Report postsecondary outcomes to inform student decisions.

ACTION: *Pass the College Transparency Act so that students, parents, employers, and policymakers know the return on investments in postsecondary education.*

Most students enroll in postsecondary education to improve their job prospects. But those who invest in postsecondary education – whether they’re workers, parents, employers, or policymakers – often don’t know what they can expect from specific programs in terms of employment and earnings because current law restricts the ability to capture this information.

Support the success of today’s college students: Working Americans.

ACTION: *Pass the Gateway to Careers Act to establish a “career pathways” fund to support the success of today’s college student.*

Adults balancing full-time work and family obligations are a rapidly growing segment of today’s community college enrollments. Some states have established strategies that ensure these students succeed, including career pathways models that combine basic and occupational skills training; career counseling and case management; and support services like child care and transportation assistance. Federal policy should build on these innovative efforts.

Strengthen connections between business and postsecondary education.

ACTION: *Pass the Community College to Career Fund Act to support industry-community college partnerships.*

Community colleges across the nation partner with local and regional industries every day to develop skills pipelines that support economic growth. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have supported these efforts through various grant programs, but not at the scale we need to keep up with demand. It’s time to make a real investment in these partnerships.

Expand work-based learning opportunities for all businesses and all.

Rebuild our nation’s infrastructure workforce through work-based learning.

ACTION: *Pass the BUILDS Act to support job training as part of any new federal infrastructure investments.*

There is growing bipartisan support for significant new investments in our nation’s roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. These efforts could create millions of new construction, manufacturing, IT and utility sector jobs in the coming years. Nearly half of these jobs would require some education and training beyond high school, meaning we will need to ramp up our support for apprenticeships and other demand-driven skills strategies.

Invest in local capacity to develop effective work-based learning programs.

ACTION: *Pass the PARTNERS Act to support local business-led partnerships critical to expanding opportunities to more businesses and workers.*

Many firms — especially small- and medium-sized businesses — lack resources to develop work-based learning programs on their own and to support the success of workers in these



programs. Industry or sector partnerships reduce the burdens on businesses by convening local stakeholders to develop programs that can enable a broad pipeline of workers to develop the skills businesses need.

Maximize employer investments in training and work-based learning.

ACTION: *Amend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to support targeted investments by employers in work-based learning and training.*

WOTC helps businesses hire workers with barriers to employment, including veterans, disadvantaged youth, and low-income workers, but does little to offset the costs of employer-provided training. As a result, many employers that offer well-paying, but higher skill jobs, are unable to take full advantage of the program by training workers with low-skills to be their future workforce.

Take a skills-based approach to poverty reduction.

Update TANF to focus on employment outcomes, not work requirements.

ACTION: *Modernize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to support training opportunities and measure results.*

More than 80 percent of today's jobs require postsecondary education and training, but less than 10 percent of adult TANF recipients have education beyond high school. Congress should update TANF to expand access to high-quality training and education that leads to career pathways and replace the outdated "work participation rate" model with a new outcomes-based system aligned with the WIOA common measures that supports long-term success for participants.

Ensure all of America's workers — including DREAMers — can help drive economic growth.

Allow DREAMers to contribute their skills and build long-term futures in the United States.

ACTION: *Enact legislation providing a pathway to citizenship for DREAMers, and ensure that the law recognizes middle-skill credentials, not just college degrees, as valid pathways.*

Approximately 1.7 million young people came to the U.S. as children without authorized immigration status. Ongoing federal policy changes regarding the status of these DREAMers and the related Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program have created uncertainty that burdens these young workers and the American businesses that rely on their skills. Congress should advance legislation such as the DREAM Act that provides permanent work authorization and eventual citizenship, and which includes middle-skill credentials as a valid pathway.

