

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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Chairman Hinojosa Statement At Hearing On Approaches to College Preparation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX), chairman of the House Subcommittee On Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, for a subcommittee hearing on “The Higher Education Act: Approaches to College Preparation.”*

Good Morning. Welcome to the second hearing on the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of Subcommittee on Higher Education Lifelong Learning and Competitiveness.

Our ability to compete in a global marketplace is directly tied to the capacity of our workforce. It is essential that we take this opportunity of the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act to prepare for the challenges ahead.

With the retirements of the baby boom generation, we are facing an exodus of highly skilled, highly educated individuals from the workforce. A workforce development system for the 21st century must find ways to maximize on-going participation from older workers who want to continue working.

Our system must also value and develop the talents of all workers – especially those with disabilities. The return on investment in reducing or eliminating the need for public assistance and enabling a person with disabilities to fully participate in the work place and in their communities is enormous. Today, our vocational and rehabilitation services programs are strained beyond their capacity. There are long and growing waiting lists for services. We need to make sure that the VR system is equipped to handle the increased demand.

Our workforce system must also be integrated with our education system. We also know that our future workforce will increasingly come from minority communities. 42 percent of our public school children are racial or ethnicity minorities. We are not equipping these young people for the demands of a knowledge-based economy. Nearly half of our black and Hispanic students fail to graduate from high school. Without this basic credential, their future contributions to the workforce will be limited.

Finally our system must be successful in building skills for the many adults who have low levels of literacy and lack a high school credential. Many of these individuals work very hard but struggle to support themselves and their families. We must invest in building their skills if we are going to have a competitive economy.

The Workforce Investment Act created a new and comprehensive workforce investment system designed to change how employment and training services are delivered. At our first hearing, we took a broad look at the implementation of the 1998 law and what areas need to be strengthened .

Today we will take closer look at the implementation of the programs authorized under Workforce Investment Act from individual, local, regional, and state perspectives. I am eager to hear the witnesses' testimony and recommendations on how we can improve the workforce development system in a way that positions both employers and employees for the future. As we look to make improvements to the Workforce Investment Act, we must never lose sight of our obligation to ensure that the programs serve those with the greatest needs.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today. Now I would like to yield to the senior republican on the subcommittee, Congressman Ric Keller of Florida, for his opening statement.

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