



Chairman Tom Cole

*Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**FY 2016 Budget Hearing – Department of Labor
March 17, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Good morning, Mr. Secretary, and welcome. Thank you for your service. The Committee recognizes the demanding role you have at a difficult time. I appreciate your work on behalf of the American people even if we won't always agree on matters of policy.

For the first time in many years we've had some encouraging news on headline unemployment numbers. But the data belie the challenges faced by the long-term unemployed and by involuntary part-time workers. Improvement in the unemployment data is also due in part to labor participation rates that remain at the lowest levels in many decades. For too many Americans, the great recession doesn't feel over.

Equally concerning is that despite the recent improvement in unemployment data, job openings continue to rise. There were five million job openings at the end of January, the highest level in 14 years. Despite billions of dollars the federal government invests in job training each year, the "skills gap" continues to grow. Employers can't find enough qualified candidates to fill the jobs they have while millions of Americans remain unemployed and underemployed. This indicates to me that there are real structural deficiencies in the workforce training system and I'd like to hear your view on what those are.

I would like to cover a lot of subjects at today's hearing. Mr. Secretary, your budget far exceeds any realistic caps on spending. While you may have the luxury of proposing increases for virtually every program, we likely won't have the ability within our allocation to meet all these requests. With proposed increases across the board for the Department of Labor, I'm having difficulty determining exactly what your priorities are. I'd like to ask you to outline those for us today.

I would also like to discuss the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act which Congress overwhelmingly passed last summer. The Committee is excited about many of the improvements WIOA makes to workforce training programs. However, I am concerned that the Department is already missing statutory implementation deadlines and delaying the benefits of this reauthorization to millions of Americans.

Finally, I would like to ask about the Department's regulatory agenda along several lines.

I have questions about the regulatory process that the Department is following. For example, you are developing a respirable silica rule that is relying on a Small Business Advocacy Review completed more than a decade ago, even though industries that will be impacted by the rule have changed significantly since that time.

I have questions about the purpose of your regulations. For example, rules on persuader agreements and on reporting and tracking workplace injuries seem to me to benefit labor unions more than the workers they are purported to protect.

And I have questions about the timing of your regulations. For example, the home care rule being implemented now seems contrary to policies many of us have supported to encourage goals like aging-in-place and home care for people with disabilities to help reduce healthcare costs and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans.

Finally, Mr. Secretary, I am deeply concerned that the Department has stopped processing H2B visas in the wake of a recent court ruling. To avoid significant economic losses to thousands of seasonal businesses ranging from seafood harvesting and horse training to amusement parks and stone quarries, the Department of Homeland Security should immediately issue an emergency rule to allow the resumption of H-2B processing and the Department of Labor could continue to participate in a consultative role in the program. I want to be assured that the Department is pursuing every recourse in order to restart the H-2B program as soon as possible.

Thanks again for being here Mr. Secretary, and I would like to yield now to Chairman Rogers, for his opening statement.

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