



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Hearing: Department of Labor
March 17, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared

Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding. Secretary Perez, we are pleased to have you with us this morning to discuss the President's budget request for the Department of Labor.

The Department, as you are well aware, plays an essential role for the American worker – ensuring that jobs are plentiful, sustainable, and safe. Unfortunately, many Americans are still struggling under the weight of our lagging economy to find meaningful employment. In my district alone, we have lost approximately 9,000 coal mining jobs in the last few years. With the DOL's focus on workforce training and development, your Department has a lot to offer in areas confronting similar situations across the country. I particularly appreciate your engagement with our bipartisan SOAR initiative in Eastern Kentucky, and I look forward to working with you as we strive to strengthen and grow the economy in that region.

While I do very much appreciate your partnership, I unfortunately find many aspects of this budget request troublesome. The Fiscal Year 2016 request includes discretionary funding of \$13.18 billion, a 10.3 percent increase over CURRENT enacted levels. This includes billions for new proposals, and assumptions that Congress will sign off on shifting programs and activities from discretionary to mandatory budget authority. The Job Driven Training Proposals – totaling \$21 billion in mandatory spending – is larger than the entire Department of Labor discretionary funding request. This Administration and your Department need to work on reducing the problem of mandatory spending, not adding to it. This runaway spending – if allowed to continue on auto-pilot – threatens to squeeze out all of the worthwhile programs that many of our constituents care for, including a number of critical programs under your charge.

Besides the huge increase in mandatory spending, the Fiscal Year 2016 budget requests significant discretionary funding for new programs and sizeable increases for others. The requests for information technology provide a good example. In your request, we see \$61 million for a new Digital Government Integrated Platform Initiative; a total of \$120 million for IT modernization, which constitutes a 677 percent increase; and multiple requests of \$3 to \$5 million for agency-specific IT improvements throughout the Department. Technology is certainly important in today's society, but these increases appear out of line in light of tight budget constraints, and I look forward to hearing from you today about why you feel these investments are necessary.

Finally, in July, 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted. An aggressive timeframe for the Department of Labor and the Department of Education to publish a set of regulations is plainly laid out in this legislation. One of WIOA's requirements was the publication of the proposed regulations by January 18, 2015. Instead of working diligently to meet the deadline required by law, your agency decided to set its own deadlines and plan to publish the proposed regulations in spring 2015. Mr. Secretary, for an administration that is overly fond of regulation, it amazes me that this process wasn't completed timely. I hope you can shed some light on your intentions in this respect.

Mr. Secretary, I thank you for being with us today. This Committee takes seriously our role in overseeing the budget policies of the Department of Labor, and I appreciate your continued engagement with us. I yield back.

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