



Chairman Tom Cole

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

Department of Labor FY 2018 Budget Hearing

June 7, 2017

Opening Statement As Prepared

Good Morning, Mr. Secretary, and welcome. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. We are looking forward to hearing your testimony.

This hearing is to review the Department of Labor's fiscal year 2018 budget request. The Committee understands that the Department had a target level of funding in this budget and that significant cuts needed to be proposed in many areas to achieve that. The Committee's task is to carefully consider the budget request and to make recommendations for the funding needs of critical programs at the Department including job training, worker safety, labor statistics, and others.

The Committee also appreciates the Department's focus on the job training and employment needs of hard-to-serve populations including Youth, Native Americans, formerly incarcerated citizens, and the nation's veterans, particularly, the Department's requested increase for the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program. I hope the Department will continue to work with the Committee and with Congress to eliminate veterans' homelessness and to better serve all of these populations.

An issue I view as critically important is the skills gap. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are currently over five million open positions for which employers are unable to find qualified candidates. Many of these are high-paying jobs and I believe the skills gap is a very significant opportunity cost for workers and for the economy overall. I look forward to hearing your views on how job training programs at the Department of Labor can better meet the needs of these employers and reduce the skills gap.

The Committee recognizes that enforcement is an important part of the Department's worker safety programs, but we continue to believe that worker safety should be the principal goal. It has been difficult to ignore the previous Administration's adversarial and punitive pursuit of labor enforcement. I believe most employers want to do the right thing for their employees and have been understandably frustrated by their partnership with these agencies at the Department of Labor. Beyond a shift of resources from enforcement to compliance assistance, I would suggest that the culture at some of these agencies needs to change. Inspectors and safety experts must view their roles as cooperative partners of employers and employees to advance worker safety across

the Nation's industries. Hard working American's deserve to know that the federal government has their back; both ensuring that good jobs are created and that their safety is ensured.

It is unfortunate that the final consolidated appropriations bill for fiscal year 2017 was not enacted prior to the time that funding decisions for your fiscal year 2018 budget request had to be finalized. In many cases, if the policy of the Administration was to maintain current funding for a program that Congress increased in fiscal year 2017, the budget request would appear to be a reduction, when in fact that is not your intention. We will simply need to carefully explain ourselves when discussing proposed increases and decreases today.

Finally, the Subcommittee needs to know the specific details for how the proposed cuts in the Department's fiscal year 2018 budget would impact job training programs and the programs that target hard to serve populations. The budget provides some of these details, and I know some are still being developed, but we look forward to hearing what you are able to share today.

I'm sure members of the Subcommittee have many questions about the budget and policy issues, including the fiduciary rule, so without further delay, I'd like to remind members and our witness that we will abide by the five minute rule so that everyone will have a chance to get their questions asked and answered.

#####