

**LinkedIn Responses to Questions for the Record from  
REPRESENTATIVE JOHN JAMES**

**Full Committee Hearing:  
“Competencies Over Degrees: Transitioning to a Skills-Based Economy”**

**June 22, 2023  
10:15 a.m.**

**Representative John James (R-MI)  
Questions for Dr. Karin Kimbrough**

1. My staff had the opportunity to touch base with Southeast Michigan Construction Academy (SEMCA), which services many constituents in my district like:
  - Eric Lesmeister from Warren – Enlisted in the Navy (but go Army) right after high school. He served for 12 years with 2 deployments. He is now an electrical level 3 student working for Power Solutions a Fraser based electrical company.
  - Anthony Brouckaert from Clinton Twp – A Second year electrical student. He works for Colville Electric an Eastpointe based electrical company. He loves the electrical field and believes he is on a successful career path.
  - Milad Al-Ton from Warren – A Second year electrical student who works at his family’s electrical company. He aspires to obtain his masters license and open his own company.

This is the American Dream. The ability to have a choice in your future, yet for too long, we thought getting indebted tens of thousands of dollars was going to lead greater and prosperous futures. In my district, the nation’s number 1 manufacturing powerhouse, we have a great deal of potential.

Dr. Kimbrough,

You and LinkedIn are uniquely positioned to understand workforce dynamics.

- a) **Would you say our biggest hurdles is the status quo, and are we seeing low-income areas being disproportionately impacted by this?**

**Dr. Karin Kimbrough Answer:**

As we know, there is an incredible amount of talent in the United States. However, we need to change how we recognize it, so that we are not leaving workers with skills behind. When employers hire based on degrees, they miss out on half of the workforce. In particular, this locks out roughly three quarters of rural, Hispanic, and Black Americans who don’t currently hold a four-year degree. Our nation and our economy cannot afford such a system to continue.

A skills-first approach to hiring can address this gap, by vastly expanding the pool of qualified talent and democratizing access to jobs. Our research found that in the U.S.

the impact of shifting to a skills-first approach increases the number of qualified, eligible workers by nearly 20 times. With a skills-first approach, in jobs where women are particularly underrepresented, such as Technology and Construction, the proportion of women in the U.S. talent pool would increase 26% more than it would for men. We also found that younger workers are in the best position to take advantage of a skills-first future. In the U.S., the talent pool increases more than 18 times for Millennial workers, and more than 21 times for Gen Z workers.

We recognize the value of a college degree. It is a meaningful signal of competency and skills. However, we need to create multiple pathways to signal relevant talent and skills.

**b) In purely layman's terms, how do we make it cool to be a welder or an electrician?**

**Dr. Karin Kimbrough Answer:**

Welders, electricians, and other skilled trades professionals have jobs that are consistently in-demand, and these are careers that don't require years of schooling but still have flexible hours and provide higher pay. These are all important quality of work considerations and add to the "cool" factor, not to mention how these careers give workers in these industries a great deal of autonomy in how and when they choose to work. These skills-driven professions allow many workers to begin to build a career quickly without having to spend four years in school or take on debt. Because many of these jobs do pay hourly, there's a lot of potential for overtime, and workers have the ability to create their own schedules because of the flexibility of the roles.

While pay can vary, take a welder in the state of California, for example (a state where more salary data is available). With only 2 years of experience (sometimes less) and a high school diploma or GED, a welder can make anywhere from \$18-\$30+ dollars per hour – that means entry level workers can begin making \$50,000+ in their first job. Electricians can make between \$30-50 an hour depending on the job, and plumbers can make anywhere from \$17-\$85 per hour.

**c) I would also like to know ways that Congress can help. How are we standing in our own way?**

**Dr. Karin Kimbrough Answer:**

Congress should consider skills-first hiring as a central tenet of workforce development legislation such as WIOA reauthorization, which LinkedIn supports, along with encouraging and supporting public and private employers seeking to implement this approach; expanding ways for participants to validate their existing skills; helping far more individuals access programs to gain new skills that are most in demand – as identified by employers; and supporting improved data and transparency so there's a clear understanding of what these skills are and where they are best acquired. We also support short-term Pell Grants to expand pathways for more individuals to gain skills.