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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on "Our Nation of Builders: Training the Builders of the Future"
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
November 15, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing to explore what needs to be done to ensure that American workers have the skills they need to succeed in the future. And thank you, Ranking Member Schakowsky, for your keen interest in this topic throughout the year.

Over the course of the last year, this Subcommittee has heard time and again from industries that they are having to leave jobs unfilled because they cannot find properly skilled workers. With our unemployment rate still way too high, this is simply not acceptable.

As this Subcommittee has learned, these unfilled jobs are often in fields requiring education or training in the STEM fields – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In addition, we understand that there is a growing need for STEM training at the high school or community college level, not just a demand for individuals with graduate-level STEM degrees.

Manufacturing jobs have changed. Where once it might have been common for a high school graduate to get a stable, well-paying factory job on the assembly line, today's jobs in manufacturing plants often require technical skills or an associate's degree. And they almost certainly require the ability to understand complex machines and processes and quickly solve any problems that may arise.

According to manufacturers, an enhanced emphasis on STEM and improvements in STEM curricula would greatly help domestic manufacturing industries and support growth, jobs, and national security.

Increasing the numbers of STEM-trained workers not only helps our manufacturers and other STEM-dependent industries, it helps workers. Not only does STEM help them develop analytical and problem-solving abilities, it may help them acquire more specialized expertise in an area of interest. Furthermore, it will help them provide for their families, as STEM occupations have higher wages, on average, than those outside STEM fields.

The Administration also has pushed STEM education from day one. Its Educate to Innovate initiative, launched in 2009, has brought together over 100 CEOs and raised over $700

million to support several public-private programs designed to: (1) mobilize the business community to improve the quality of STEM education; (2) recruit and prepare 100,000 new, effective teachers in STEM fields over ten years; and (3) promote broader participation in STEM fields by girls and women and traditionally underrepresented ethnic minorities.

At this hearing, I hope to hear what high schools, community colleges, and manufacturers are doing to meet this growing demand for STEM-trained workers. In particular, we need to understand not only what they are teaching and how they are partnering with each other but also whether our schools have the regional data necessary to point eager students on a path toward a successful career. We also need to understand what companies are doing to retrain or otherwise provide opportunities for their older workers and learn how STEM can help narrow the wage gap for women and men.

I am hopeful that this hearing will help us understand how to make STEM education as effective as possible. STEM is a critical piece of the broader economy, and thus, STEM training is a necessary part of our continued economic progress.

Thank you.