

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
“Mentoring, Training, and Apprenticeships for STEM Education and Careers”
February 15, 2018

Thank you Chairwoman Comstock and Ranking Member Lipinski for holding this hearing, and good morning and welcome to our esteemed panel of witnesses. This country needs STEM workers at all skill levels – from the factory floor to cutting edge research laboratories. In this Committee we often focus on the more advanced degrees and skill levels. Today we will be examining the large and diverse blue-collar STEM workforce that powers our economy.

Technology and automation are rapidly changing the nature of the blue-collar workforce, as well as the skills that a worker needs to qualify for a well-paying job and career. Every sector of our economy is experiencing an increased demand for workers with STEM skills. In November of last year, I co-hosted a panel on Blue Collar STEM at an event in the Capitol Visitors Center. We were pleased to have Dr. McCrary participate in that panel as well.

One of the major themes to emerge from that panel was the need for greater coordination between educators and employers. Panelists stressed the need for employers to provide input on what skills they require and to contribute monetarily to training. There was also discussion on holding employers accountable for hiring students once they graduate from their training programs. Another major theme was the persistence of the stigma against vocational training. These are highly-skilled, good paying jobs, but we clearly need to do better at educating the public at large that these are attractive careers for themselves and their children.

Much of today’s panel will focus on these same themes, especially on the role apprenticeships can play in developing of a skilled technical workforce. We have an excellent panel that represents a range of stakeholders and thinkers on these questions, and I look forward to the discussion.

Last June, President Trump issued an Executive Order on expanding apprenticeships in which he required every federal agency to submit to OMB a list of programs that are designed to promote skills development and workforce readiness. Agencies must also submit data on the effectiveness of these programs, or carry out new evaluations if the data do not already exist.

Madame Chairwoman, a number of agencies within our jurisdiction have programs of this type. I hope we can follow up with a hearing, or perhaps a bipartisan letter to these agencies to learn about the progress they’ve made since last summer in identifying and evaluating their workforce development programs.

With that, I thank the witnesses for being here this morning to share your insights, and I yield back.