

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

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Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairman Hinojosa Statement At Subcommittee Hearing On
New Innovations and Best Practices under the Workforce
Investment Act**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, for a subcommittee hearing on “New Innovations and Best Practices under the Workforce Investment Act.”*

Good afternoon and welcome to the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Competitiveness hearing on New Innovations and Best Practices under the Workforce Investment Act.

One of the top legislative priorities for our subcommittee is the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act – also known as WIA.

WIA was last reauthorized in 1998 and was due for reauthorization in 2003. In other words, it is long overdue.

America’s workers cannot afford to wait any longer for an upgrade to our workforce investment system. Our economy has lost 3.6 million jobs since December 2007, with 598,000 jobs shed last month alone. Unemployment has surged to 7.6 percent. The magnitude of these losses is greater than anything we have seen in over a generation.

Worse, as we face the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression, it is clear that we have failed to provide our workers with the education and skills that would help them weather the storm. According to the National Commission on Adult Literacy’s report, Reach Higher, America, 80-90 million U.S. adults, roughly half of the workforce, lack the basic education and communication skills required for jobs that pay family sustaining wages.

These are the challenges we must address as we renew the job training, adult education, and vocational rehabilitative services programs authorized under the Workforce Investment Act.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which includes a multi-billion dollar investment in job training to help prepare laid-off, adult, and younger workers for jobs in emerging industries including green jobs, is a critical first step to getting America back to work.

Just as we talk about modernizing our physical infrastructure, we need to modernize our infrastructure for supporting human capital -- that is where the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act will be key.

In 1998, we took a bold step forward in trying to unify a collection of discreet workforce development programs into a coherent system that would serve workers and employers alike. WIA envisioned one-stop services for locally developed solutions to workforce development needs. The law was enacted during a time of economic expansion, a time when we were adding jobs and not shedding them. Today, we face a starkly different environment and we must adjust our workforce investment policy to the new reality.

An improved WIA should be a key plank in our plans to restore economic prosperity to America's working families. We have an opportunity to update job training programs so that they not only place workers into jobs but also onto career pathways to better wages and advancement in the workplace. Reauthorization is the perfect time to get serious about re-engaging adult learners, who struggle with literacy or who lack a high school diploma, with our education system, providing them with the skills and credentials they need for success.

We also need to make sure that our investment in WIA results in more job training and education services in our communities. We need to look for innovative ways to manage the infrastructure and administrative costs of the system so that we can maximize the resources that are available for direct services to workers.

Finally, we need to work on an accountability system that provides us with the information we need to determine that the programs are achieving their goals, while at the same time build in accountability measures for serving the populations with the greatest barriers to employment.

I would like to work with all of the members of our subcommittee to shape a WIA reauthorization bill that will garner broad, bipartisan support.

Today's hearing is the beginning of our deliberations for the 111th Congress. I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today. Your testimony will help set the stage for our work ahead.

I would like to recognize the Senior Republican Member of our Subcommittee, Rep. Brett Guthrie, for his opening statement.

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