

Chairman Roy Blunt Opening Statement
Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education and Related Agencies

Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the Department of Labor

May 2, 2019

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you, Secretary Acosta, for appearing before the Subcommittee today to discuss the Department of Labor's fiscal year 2020 budget request. We look forward to your testimony.

The Department's budget request is \$10.9 billion, a reduction of \$1.2 billion or 10 percent, largely mirroring the last budget request. The budget includes a handful of positive, forward-leaning proposals, such as funding for apprenticeship, veterans' workforce training, and employer compliance assistance. However, the budget also cuts funding or eliminates programs the Administration says are duplicative or ineffective.

I agree that we should constantly evaluate programs and be willing to reduce or eliminate funding for programs that are ineffective and prioritize that funding elsewhere. We have made those difficult decisions in previous budgets and I know we have more we could do in that regard. However, as similar as this request is to previous ones, I expect the committee will have much the same reaction as it did to those, especially the unrealistic \$703 million cut in the Job Corps program.

Therefore, we should focus on the programs we can all agree on, which starts with workforce-training programs, particularly the apprenticeship program the Committee started four years ago. Mr. Secretary, when we were in Missouri together earlier this year, we met with apprentices at the Carpenter's Joint Apprenticeship training facility in St. Louis. This program is a DOL registered apprenticeship program, currently training 1,300 apprentices in carpentry trades. Each apprentice completes 4 to 4.5 years of training, working alongside contractors in the field, all while earning a wage. These apprentices not only earn family sustaining salaries upon completion – averaging \$75,000 a year – but they are also free of student debt when they complete the program. The apprenticeship program has received strong bipartisan support and I look forward to hearing more about how the Department is deploying these funds.

Second, the budget requests further investment toward workforce programs that are responsive to the needs of Americans looking for jobs, including our veterans and military spouses. Veterans have skills and experiences that are an asset to employers, but finding the right job opportunity can be a major challenge as they transition from active duty to civilian life. Companies like Winning Technologies in St. Louis, are setting the standard for their veterans hiring and retention practices, conducting outreach at Scott Air Force Base to recruit separating military service members. More than 30 percent of Winning Technologies' workforce are veterans and they are a recipient of DOL's HIRE Vets Medallion award. I am a strong advocate for reducing barriers to employment and, particularly focused on the need to increase cross-state licensing, which can be challenging for military spouses who move every two to three years. I appreciate that the budget includes resources to address these workforce challenges, especially for our military families.

We also must be certain to target workforce training to regions particularly hard hit. In FY2018, the committee started a rural workforce initiative focused in the Delta and Appalachian regions where unemployment rates are higher than the national average. We have now appropriated \$60 million for this

initiative and I am pleased the budget includes another \$30 million in fiscal year 2020 to help individuals who have lost their jobs learn new skills and meet the workforce demands of the 21st Century. However, I am disappointed that not a dollar of FY2018 funds have been awarded even though you have had the funding for well over a year. This delay is hurting a population that needs these targeted resources to recover. I expect the Department to move forward with obligating these dollars and the FY2019 funding immediately.

The Department of Labor serves an important role in the functioning of our overall economy through the workforce programs you oversee. By most every major indicator, the U.S. economy is thriving. We have had more than 100 months of job growth and the unemployment rate is holding steady around 3.8 percent. Everyone benefits from a strong and growing economy – when jobs are created, employment is sustained, and Americans’ wages increase. While the nature of work is changing in the 21st Century, there are greater opportunities today for Americans to climb the economic ladder and earn family-sustaining wages. I look forward to hearing how the Department’s budget proposal will continue to support high-quality training and employment programs.

Mr. Secretary, I look forward to hearing your testimony today and appreciate your work on these important issues. Thank you.

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