



October 3, 2022

The Honorable Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen
US Senate
Washington, DC

The Honorable Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen
US Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo,

I'm writing on behalf of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition to express our support for Sen. Tom Cotton's American Workforce Act (AWA), a thoughtful, innovative approach to workforce development that has the potential to provide more effective training for American workers and badly needed talent for employers, enhancing opportunity and boosting economic competitiveness.

The Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition is a Washington-based business group focused on job training and workforce development. Members include employers and employer associations from a broad range of industries experiencing skills mismatches and worker shortages – construction, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and IT, among others.

Members of our coalition know firsthand how a tight labor market is hamstringing their industries and hindering US economic growth. As of last month, even with 6 million Americans out of work, 11.2 million jobs stood empty across the US.

The ups and downs of the business cycle have little effect on the persistent labor mismatches – gaps between worker's skills and the types of jobs available – our industries have experienced in recent years. And the challenge is particularly acute for sectors that rely on skilled technical workers – sectors like construction and manufacturing, where demand is sure to grow in years ahead as automation and reshoring transform the US economy.

There will be changes needed in many quarters to address these continuing worker shortages, but the American Workforce Act is a good place to start – an approach tailored to benefit both employers and trainees, even as it minimizes federal bureaucracy.

Among the provisions of the act we find most encouraging:

Applying the lessons of apprenticeship. Considered by many to be the gold standard of workforce preparation, apprenticeship combines classroom learning with paid on-the-job experience, teaching skills in demand across an industry. Most apprenticeships last at least one year and produce journeyman workers. The AWA builds on the lessons of apprenticeship but applies the principles that make it so effective to a broader range of

training opportunities, offering vouchers for programs as short as six months and as long as three years, or longer.

Employers in the driver's seat. Only employers know what skills they need to keep their businesses open and growing. Only employers can see the trends ahead in their industries. Only employers know which training partners are best suited to provide instruction to produce the workforce they need. The AWA works through employers, empowering them to design the training they need and find appropriate partners to provide it, whether at a community college, a high school, a trade association, a labor union, a nonprofit organization or a subdivision of the firm.

Streamlined processing and paperwork. Unlike the existing process for registering an apprenticeship program with the US Department of Labor or a state apprenticeship agency – a process many employers find prohibitively bureaucratic and unwieldy – the AWA approach is designed to be streamlined, transparent and easy to use for employers.

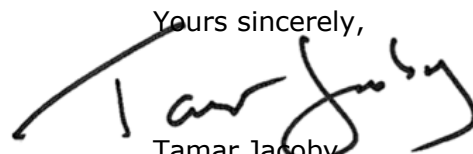
Appropriate guardrails. The employers in our coalition are also taxpayers, and as taxpayers, they appreciate the quality control measures included in the AWA: safeguards to protect trainees and ensure that programs prepare workers for well-paying, in-demand occupations.

Members of the Opportunity America Jobs and Careers Coalition have little expertise in matters of higher education, and the coalition remains agnostic about the 1 percent endowment tax included in the bill.

But we are encouraged by the new ideas and fresh approach that Sen. Cotton brings to the challenge of workforce training. For all the proven benefits of apprenticeship and the broad bipartisan endorsement that the model has enjoyed in recent years, it has proven surprisingly difficult to scale earn-and-learn training in the United States. Among the reasons, we believe: there can be no meaningful expansion without robust buy-in by employers – and we have high hopes for the AWA's employer-centered approach.

There is much that is lacking in America's approach to workforce training and much that remains to be improved. The AWA is an important step, opening the way to more thoroughgoing reform and a broader bipartisan debate. We look forward to working with members of Congress on both sides of the aisle to rethink and revamp America's approach to workforce training, including apprenticeship and shorter earn-and-learn programs.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tamar Jacoby', written over a horizontal line.

Tamar Jacoby
President

CC: Senate Commerce Committee Chair Maria Cantwell
Senate Commerce Committee Ranking Member Roger Wicker
Senate Environment & Public Works Committee Chairman Thomas Carper
Senate Environment & Public Works Committee Ranking Member Shelley Moore Capito
Senate HELP Committee Chair Patty Murray
Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Richard Burr