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Opening Statement of Rep. John Kline (R-MN)
Chairman, Committee on Education and the Workforce
Hearing on “Expanding Opportunity in America’s Schools and Workplaces”

Last week, we were reminded once again of the persistent challenges facing the American people. The Department of Commerce reported that the economy grew a meager 2.6 percent in the last quarter of 2014. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, we have now experienced nine straight years of growth below three percent.

This anemic economy is hurting families across the country; it’s hurting nearly nine million workers who remain unemployed; it’s hurting more than six million workers who need full-time jobs but can only find part-time work; it’s hurting moms and dads trying to pay the bills and put food on the table with smaller paychecks.

As workplaces continue to struggle, so do the nation’s schools. One out of five students will drop out of high school before receiving a diploma. Making matters worse, far too many students graduate without the knowledge and skills they need to pursue higher education or compete in the workforce. Meanwhile, college costs continue to soar, and graduates are leaving college with too much debt and too few job prospects.

These are tough problems that have been around for years, and unfortunately, the president’s policies are making them worse. The Obama administration continues to pursue new rules and regulations that jeopardize employee rights, stymie growth, and make it harder for employers to raise wages and create new jobs. A convoluted waiver system is creating more confusion and uncertainty in K-12 schools and flawed regulatory schemes will deny students access to the college or university of their choice.

And just this week, the president put forward a budget proposal that calls for more spending, more taxes, and more borrowing to create new government programs. Middle-class families are being squeezed, and a larger federal presence in classrooms and workplaces is not the answer. The president wants us to double down on the failed policies of the last six years. The American people deserve better. We need to do better.

We must provide employers certainty and flexibility so they can grow their businesses, create new jobs, and give workers the raise they’ve earned. We must help more students pursue the dream of a college degree without living a nightmare of debt and

(More)

unemployment. We must advance K-12 education reform that empowers parents and places more control in the hands of teachers and local decision-makers. We must modernize our pension system and hold the administration accountable for policies that make it harder for individuals to succeed in school and the workplace.

The American people are desperate to move the country in a new direction; they are not willing to accept slow growth and stagnant wages as the new normal; they deserve bold solutions that will lead to a strong, vibrant economy, more good paying jobs, and higher incomes for working families. These are the priorities shared by most Americans and they must be our priorities as well.

In the coming months, we intend to advance responsible reforms that will help make a difference in the lives of students, employers, teachers, and working families. We have an excellent panel of witnesses to tell us what's working and what isn't, and to help inform our efforts moving forward. Again, I want to thank our witnesses for joining us and look forward to our discussion.

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U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce