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**Opening Statement by Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) | Hearing on  
“Examining the Policies and the Priorities of the U.S. Department of  
Labor”**

The Department of Labor is on the frontline of the issues facing workers and job creators, and it sets policies that have a widespread impact on our nation’s economy, employment growth, retirement security, and more.

Whether they relate to health care, worker protections, retirement planning, workforce development, or employee wages and benefits — it is the responsibility of this committee to ensure those policies are in the best interest of workers, employers, and taxpayers.

I’ve said this before but I’ll say it again: No matter what party controls the administration – this committee is dedicated to robust oversight. We take our oversight responsibilities very seriously. Today’s hearing is the latest step in our effort to hold federal government officials accountable.

The American people are counting on that accountability, especially at a time when the economy is still improving. We are all encouraged by the economic growth we have seen this year. In the third quarter of 2017, real GDP increased at an annual rate of 3 percent. That is a remarkable improvement, considering it’s twice as much as the mere 1.5 percent growth rate we saw during the final year of the Obama administration.

It’s also great to see more and more Americans getting back to work. Nearly 1.5 million jobs have been added since February. Meaningful progress has been made, but there’s no question we have more work to do after eight years of lost opportunity.

However, even though the unemployment rate is down, we still have 6.5 million workers out of work, including 1.6 million on a long-term basis. 4.8 million workers are working part-time because their hours have been cut back or because they were unable to find a full-time job.

*(More)*

At the same time, we have 6.1 million jobs unfilled, due in part to our nation's skills gap. Expanding pathways to career success is a critical component to closing this gap and helping more Americans find good-paying jobs. That's why Congress and the administration have made workforce development and skills-based education a leading priority.

This week happens to be National Apprenticeship Week, and so we are eager to hear from you, Mr. Secretary, on the steps the department plans to take to promote apprenticeships and other skills-based education programs.

This is something our committee has been focused on for quite some time now, and it is encouraging to have a partner in the White House and the Department of Labor. We look forward to further discussion of how we can work together to expand educational opportunities and empower more Americans to realize their God-given potential.

In addition, I hope that you will be able to provide committee members and the public with your views about the department's efforts to advance economic opportunities for workers by strengthening workplace democracy, ensuring safe and healthy workplaces, enhancing retirement security, and providing workers and employers with more affordable health care options.

We are also very interested in hearing more about the department's regulatory and enforcement agenda. This committee spent the early part of this year advancing resolutions under the Congressional Review Act to clean up the mess from the Obama administration and deliver regulatory relief for hardworking men and women.

In fact, five out of fourteen of the CRA resolutions that were signed into law originated from this committee. And just last week, the House passed the Save Local Business Act to roll back the Obama-era joint employer scheme that threatens 1.7 million jobs, according to the American Action Forum.

We know the department has its work cut out after eight years of an unprecedented regulatory rampage. But we look forward to building on the progress we've made together so we can get government out of the way and unleash prosperity and opportunity.

There are also a number of issues impacting retirement security that deserve our attention. This includes the need to protect access to affordable retirement advice and empower more Americans to plan for the future.

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