

Apprenticeships – Skills For Life



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When a room full of passionate apprenticeship advocates met in Washington last week for the first day of the Apprenticeship Forward conference, the mood was understandably upbeat and optimistic.

Why? Because calls for the U.S. to expand apprenticeship programs seem to be gaining more traction daily. And overnight the news had come through that Congress' omnibus budget compromise would again expand funding for apprenticeships, to \$95 million over the next year.

Now more than ever, Americans need educational options and career pathways which are cost effective and oriented to delivering skilled careers and stable employment. That common ground was found to expand appropriations in the budget bill, and is a strong signal that interest in apprenticeships is not expendable.

I recently threw my support behind an audacious plan for the Trump Administration to adopt a nationwide target to hire five million apprenticeships in five years. Since then, a range of influential people and organizations, from Ivanka Trump to the Fed Chair, Janet Yellen, company CEO's including Salesforce's Marc Benioff to the National Skills Coalition, have come forth to endorse this proposal.

The five million target may have started as a "man on the moon" goal, however given these endorsements span so many points of our political compass, the cautious optimism of the apprenticeship advocates, employers and educators present was understandable.

Debates about how to address issues around next generation jobs, economic mobility, educational opportunity and college affordability were key themes of last year's election cycle.

Apprenticeships and vocational/technical education and can play a key role in addressing each of these problems.

The current abiding narrative of Washington, D.C. is of hostility and corrosive political division. However when it comes to career and technical education issues, congressional consensus seems to be the norm. Even at the vicious height of last year's election campaign, Republicans and Democrats united to support the \$1.1 billion Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (also known as the Perkins Reauthorization Bill), which sailed through the House with a 405-to-5 vote.