

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We appreciate your steadfast commitment to addressing the needs of workers as our nation continues to grapple with the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the American Rescue Plan, your Administration has demonstrated the importance of returning the U.S. to full employment as soon as possible. But many workers will find that their pre-pandemic job is no longer there, and they may need more or different skills to rejoin the workforce. Accordingly, as your Administration crafts an economic recovery plan, we strongly urge that you include \$50 billion for our nation's workforce system, make workforce training a central part of your recovery agenda, and partner with us to help get people back to work and build back better.

A recent report from the Department of Labor shows that about four million people are now classified as long-term unemployed after being out of work for more than six months, and that total is likely an undercount.¹ The Economic Policy Institute estimates that 15 percent of our nation's workforce is unemployed, otherwise out of work because of the pandemic, or employed but experiencing a drop in hours and pay.² Workforce boards, labor unions, community colleges, community-based organizations, small businesses, and other stakeholders are training and supporting displaced and underemployed workers, but they are in urgent need of more resources. Congress has provided only \$345 million for our nation's workforce system in the COVID relief packages, compared to nearly \$6 billion during the Great Recession.

We applaud your call for investing \$50 billion in high-quality training programs as part of your "*Made in All of America*" agenda, and we look forward to working with you to uphold this commitment in the recovery package. A bold \$50 billion investment should include both the Relaunching America's Workforce Act, which provides \$15 billion for our nation's workforce training systems to help dislocated workers, and a \$35 billion workforce title to upskill and reskill workers as we undertake a renewed investment in our nation's infrastructure.

¹ "The Employment Situation – January 2021." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 5, 2021. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empsit_02052021.htm.

² Shierholz, Heidi. "The Economy Trump Handed off to President Biden." Economic Policy Institute, February 5, 2021. <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-economy-trump-handed-off-to-president-biden-25-5-million-workers-15-0-of-the-workforce-hit-by-the-coronavirus-crisis-in-january/>.

Our immediate task is to help workers who have been displaced or dislocated because of the pandemic and to prevent any additional layoffs. The Relaunching America's Workforce Act invests \$15 billion in our nation's workforce training system to help dislocated workers access training, career navigation, and other supportive services. Recent reports have suggested that approximately seven million jobs may not return to the labor market after the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Many unemployed individuals will need job training to reenter the workforce, and many employed workers will need additional training as the future of work evolves.

Building back better means restoring economic fairness with better wages, stronger benefits, and fair and safe workplaces. The recovery package must include a workforce title with dedicated \$35 billion in funding to provide people, especially local workers most affected by the pandemic, with the pathways and support services needed to access good-paying jobs.

Infrastructure investments have not always been paired with support for training and services that help individuals take advantage of new employment opportunities. To help more people access the infrastructure, clean energy, and manufacturing jobs that the economic recovery package will create, we must provide adequate funding for paid, on-the-job training programs. Investments in our aging infrastructure are critical and the investments in our people who will repair and rebuild it are just as important. The transition to a clean energy economy will require training a new generation of workers in their communities. By directing these investments to employers that maintain robust labor standards and high-quality jobs, we can make sure that individuals can provide for themselves and their families.

Investing in our nation's workforce system can also help diversify our workforce. Long-standing structural inequities, including racism, sexism, and discrimination in the workplace erode the job and wage mobility for many women. Women represent 64 percent of the workforce in the 40 lowest paying jobs, and 42 percent of women in low-wage jobs were living near or below the federal poverty line in 2018.⁴ The realities are even more alarming for women of color who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs compared to their share of the overall workforce. By strengthening investments in pre-apprenticeships and providing better access to support services, we can help individuals who have historically faced barriers to employment, especially women and people of color, access good-paying jobs. We can support workers through pre-employment services like skills training, adult basic education, work attire, equipment, child care, and transportation; early employment support like mentoring, targeted training, case management; and continuing employment services.

³ Van Dam, Andrew. "As Permanent Economic Damage Piles up, the Covid Crisis Is Looking More like the Great Recession." *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/08/25/permanent-economic-damage-piles-up-covid-crisis-is-looking-more-like-great-recession/>.

⁴ Jasmine Tucker and Julie Vogtman, *When Hard Work Is Not Enough: Women in Low-Paid Jobs* (April 2020), https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Women-in-Low-Paid-Jobs-report_pp04-FINAL-4.2.pdf.

Following the Great Recession, you led an extensive effort to review our nation's workforce system across federal agencies.⁵ You have once again shown tremendous leadership with your call for \$50 billion in your "*Made in All of America*" agenda. We are encouraged by that call as we address our nation's deteriorating infrastructure, transition to a clean energy economy, and strengthen American manufacturing. Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to our continued collaboration as we invest in our workers and build back better.

Sincerely,

Three handwritten signatures in blue ink are arranged horizontally. From left to right: Suzanne Bonamici, Andy Levin, and Frederica S. Wilson.

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

Andy Levin
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

CC: Martin J. Walsh, Secretary of Labor

⁵ "Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity." The White House, July 2014.
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills_report.pdf.

ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES

Alma S. Adams, Ph.D
Jake Auchincloss
Earl Blumenauer
Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.
Joaquin Castro
David N. Cicilline
Joe Courtney
Angie Craig
Peter A. DeFazio
Mark DeSaulnier
Debbie Dingell
Adriano Espaillat
Bill Foster
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Raúl M. Grijalva
Jahana Hayes
Brian Higgins
Steven Horsford
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
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Joe Neguse
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