

February 5, 2014

Vice President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Biden,

During the State of the Union, the President tasked your office with a complete review of the federal job training programs intended to help millions of unemployed Americans find meaningful work. I am encouraged by the President's willingness to overhaul the labyrinth of federal job training programs, and offer my support as you begin your investigation.

In 2011, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a study exposing a web of 47 separate programs across nine different federal agencies, each of which overlapped with another program in providing similar services to similar populations. Together, these programs cost taxpayers over \$18 billion annually. Yet, despite billions of dollars and decades of job training programs, as of December, 10.4 million Americans were unemployed.

The President's plan to use executive prerogative to reduce duplication and demand effectiveness from the federal job training programs is to be commended. I encourage you to work with Congress in this endeavor. The House Education and Workforce Committee previously reported a bill to consolidate 37 job training programs, 29 of which were included in the GAO's 2011 report. Similar efforts have been introduced in the Senate.

The President called on Congress to fund "proven programs that connect ready-to-work Americans with ready-to-be-filled jobs." Unfortunately, determining which programs are working and deserve ongoing taxpayer investment is nearly impossible. GAO's work found only five of the 47 job training programs had an impact study completed to assess whether program participants could actually secure a job related to the training they received, leading GAO to assert, "little is known about the effectiveness of most programs." Those looking for work are desperate for jobs and we do not have time to waste funding dozens of programs failing to meet the needs of unemployed Americans.

Following GAO's work, my office undertook a nearly two-year investigation into job training programs nationwide, as well as of those within my own state of Oklahoma. We released two reports, fully detailing our findings on the current state of federal job training programs.


The first report, *Help Wanted: How Federal Job Training Programs are Failing Workers*, revealed numerous examples of waste, mismanagement and even corruption in federal job training programs. Some seeking job training, for example, spent their days sitting on a bus. Others were given training for jobs that did not exist, or were paid to sit through educational sessions about jobs they already had. In one state, workforce agency employees took more than 100 gambling trips to casinos mostly during work hours.

We then released *What Works (and What Doesn't): The Good, Bad, and Ugly of Federal Job Training in Oklahoma*, a review that included 70 field interviews and meetings with officials. The report found that Oklahoma residents have access to 40 different federal job training programs, operated by at least 45 groups, organizations, tribes, state agencies, educational institutions and quasigovernment contractors, across more than 180 physical locations, with an annual cost to taxpayers of \$164 million. One of the key takeaways in the report is the striking difference in outcomes between federal job training programs and those operated at the state and local level. For example, CareerTech, a predominately state-funded program operated by the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technical Education, placed an impressive 91 percent of graduates in jobs – a placement rate far above those of more expensive federal programs.

These investigations and findings lead me to the conclusion that many existing federal job training programs serve little purpose other than to provide employment for those administering the programs and receiving the grants. Unfortunately, the workforce and job training needs of the millions of Americans looking for work are not being met, despite the billions spent. There is no question a highly skilled workforce is a key ingredient to getting the economy back on track and to being competitive in a global economy. But instead of creating more federal job training programs or increasing spending on those that haven't proven effective, Washington should consider a new approach to aiding those in need, one that empowers states and employers to design and run their own programs.

These two reports are attached for your review, as you begin to learn about federal job training programs. I offer my full support and collaboration to you throughout this process and would welcome the opportunity to work with you to help put Americans back to work.

Sincere Regards,

  
Tom A. Coburn, M.D.  
United States Senate