



LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2026

Across the country, millions of workers, students, and employers are ready to build on real federal momentum: from new access to **Pell grants** for high-quality, short-term programs that connect people to in-demand jobs, to bipartisan proposals that strengthen **sector partnerships**, modernize **WIOA**, expand **apprenticeships**, and improve

access to **digital skills**. These are important steps to help workers build skills, businesses find the talent they need, and communities thrive.

But that progress is at risk. Deep cuts to workforce programs and **rollbacks to SNAP and Medicaid** would make it harder for people to meet their basic needs or train for new

opportunities—and harder for employers to find skilled workers.

To keep our workforce strong, Congress must sustain and strengthen investments in our workforce and the people who make it run, ensuring that workers, businesses, and communities contribute to the nation's growth and prosperity.

1. Invest in the Nation's Workforce

Despite growing demand for skilled workers, Congressional funding for workforce programs has remained largely flat for three years, which, when adjusted for inflation, represents a significant decrease in funding and continues a trend of more than 20 years of declining federal investment.

➤ Congress should increase FY27 funding for critical workforce programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Adult Education, Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE), and Apprenticeship, and oppose any cuts.

Critically underfunded programs mean workers can't access training that leads to good jobs, and local

businesses struggle to find the skilled employees they need to grow.

2. Remove Barriers and Strengthen Supports for Workers and Businesses

Strong, up-to-date, modern systems that connect workers to in-demand skills and provide access to supportive services are key to workforce success.

➤ Congress should reauthorize WIOA to incorporate programs that build technological skills by passing Digital Skills for Today's Workforce Act and strengthen the delivery of career and training services.

➤ Congress should invest in supportive services, safety net programs, and key tax credits, including funding for

child care, elder care, transportation, and housing to remove financial barriers to skills training. Congress should also protect programs like Medicaid and SNAP to support working families.

WIOA is the primary law responsible for the structure, programs, and funding of the nation's public workforce system, and the nation's main vehicle for workforce training, and since its last reauthorization in 2014, needs updating for our modern economy and current needs, like digital skills. Investments in supportive services ensure workers can afford to train for new skills, allowing businesses to find the skilled employees they need and our economy to become more resilient.

3. Support Proven Industry Partnerships

Right now, there is fragmentation in the workforce system for different stakeholders, and no dedicated federal funding for industry partnerships that bring together businesses, community colleges, training providers, unions and worker organizations, and community organizations to develop industry-specific workforce strategies.

➤ Congress should introduce and pass legislation that creates grants to support local businesses to launch, scale, and strengthen industry partnerships to address workforce challenges.

These partnerships expand training access, especially for workers of color, by creating locally driven training programs that lead directly to good jobs. They also equip local businesses that often lack the staff and resources to develop their own training programs, with the resources they need to grow.

4. Expand Access to Affordable, Career-Connected Postsecondary Education

Workforce Pell is an important step toward ensuring high-quality, career-connected programs are within reach for more people. But affordability still varies widely, and many learners still struggle to access programs that lead directly to good jobs.

➤ Congress should introduce and pass the Gateways to Careers Act, which supports comprehensive career pathways and wraparound services to help students persist in and complete postsecondary programs.

➤ Congress should pass the ACCESS to Careers Act to provide grants for students for wraparound supports, career navigation, and to build connections with employers.

Clear, affordable pathways to in-demand credentials help workers move up in their careers and help employers find the skilled talent they need to grow.

5. Strengthen and Expand Earn-and-Learn Opportunities

Earn-and-learn opportunities allow workers to gain in-demand skills while earning wages and help employers meet workforce needs. But too many local businesses lack the resources to develop or participate in apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs.

➤ Congress should modernize the National Apprenticeship Act to grow registered apprenticeships to reach more workers and industries.

➤ Congress should introduce and pass the SKILL UP Act to expand the Work Opportunity Tax Credit to incentivize employers to hire and train eligible workers through work-based learning programs.

Earn-and-learn pathways help workers advance in their careers and help businesses grow, boosting local economies and building a stronger workforce.

6. Leverage Data to Ensure Fair Outcomes

As Workforce Pell is implemented in July 2026, clear and transparent data will be essential to ensure that programs deliver real value to workers and meet employers' hiring needs. Currently, there's not enough information to understand which programs lead to good jobs and economic mobility.

➤ Congress should pass the College Transparency Act to provide students, families, institutions, and policymakers with access to comprehensive, transparent higher education and workforce outcomes data, including information on non-degree credentials.

Better data helps working people make informed decisions about their education and career pathways—and it helps businesses and policymakers invest in programs that drive real economic growth.



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