

SKILLS GAP STRATEGY ACT [H.R. 4541]

Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick (PA-8) / Rep. Matt Cartwright (PA-17)

Despite a national unemployment rate of over 7% and millions of Americans looking for work, the Department of Labor estimates that there are nearly 4 million job openings in the U.S. Employers, however, frequently cite a "skills gap" as a significant barrier to filling these positions. In fact, it is estimated that as many as 600,000 high-skilled manufacturing jobs alone are left unfilled due to an undertrained workforce. Many experts agree that one solution is for employers to play a larger role in education and workforce training.

The Department of Labor shares this understanding, but when it comes to jobs, no effort is sufficient until we reach full employment and employers no longer struggle to find qualified workers. That is why the Skills Gap Strategy Act requires the Department to develop a *goal-oriented strategy* to address the skills gap by providing recommendations to:

- Increase on-the-job training and apprenticeship opportunities;
- Help employers participate more in education and workforce training;
- Identify and prioritize in-demand credentials in existing and emerging industries; and
- Maximize the use of existing Department resources to focus on the skills gap.

When completing the report, the Department should consider:

- Specific labor barriers contributing to the skills gap;
- Policies that have proven successful in key industries, regions and countries where employers play a larger role in education and workforce training;
- Ways to better utilize Registered Apprenticeship and other workforce development programs; and
- Developing ideas with the Departments of Commerce and Education to –
 - Align education with industry and enhance employer participation in career and technical education programs;
 - Increase pre-apprenticeship and college credit courses in secondary schools;
 - Improve school-to-work transitions and connections.

The Skills Gap Strategy Act recognizes current budgetary constraints and asks the Department of Labor to focus on solutions that utilize existing resources, programs, and personnel. Closing the skills gap will require participation from individual workers, the education community, and employers, but the federal government has the ability to help, and a specific plan should be in place to do just that.

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Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick is serving his third term in the U.S. House of Representatives. He represents Pennsylvania's 8th district which includes all of Bucks County as well as a portion of Montgomery County. He serves as the Vice Chairman of the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.