

Labor Secretary Rolls Out President Trump's Apprenticeship Plan

During Monday's press briefing, Secretary of Labor Alex Acosta announced President Donald Trump's plan to fill 6 million current job openings across the U.S.—the most ever in American history—through apprenticeship programs.

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer opened the briefing up by noting Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, Office of American Innovation Director Reed Cordish, and White House Adviser Ivanka Trump all played a role in developing the plan, as well. The following is Acosta's comments about the program:

As you know by now, the president will be making an important announcement regarding apprenticeships this week. He'll be visiting the Department of Labor on Wednesday.

There are currently 6 million job openings in the United States—vacant jobs that can be filled. This is the highest number of job vacancies ever. A Business Roundtable survey released just last week found that 95 percent of executives reported problems finding qualified workers. Americans want to work. American companies want to hire. The issue is a mismatch between available jobs and prospective employees' job skills.

This skills gap is a particular challenge in some of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy—health care and information technology. And it also persists in some of the more traditional sectors of the economy. There are currently 360,000 job vacancies in manufacturing. There are 200,000 job vacancies in construction. And with the upcoming plans for infrastructure, those job vacancies in construction are only going to increase.

Apprenticeships teach skills needed to bridge this skills gap. An apprenticeship combines a paid work component with an educational component. Apprentices earn while they learn, and in the process, they largely avoid the substantial student debt that you see with higher education today.

The most obvious benefit of apprenticeships is a good job. Individuals who complete apprenticeship programs have an average starting salary of about \$60,000 a year. Nine out of 10 are employed upon completion of the programs. Both the starting salary and the employment rate are higher than that of traditional college graduates.

Apprenticeships are also going to increase to labor productivity. Apprentices hit the ground running. When they start a job, they're more able, more productive, and tend to be more loyal to the employer. Despite these benefits, apprenticeships make only about 3 percent of the American workforce. This administration will expand apprentices across most, if not all, industries.

Higher education, too, should assume responsibility for promoting apprenticeships. Community colleges and four-year colleges have an obligation to work with students to educate them in skills they need to succeed. Demand-driven, experience-based education is not new. It's used to some extent in the healthcare sector. Demand-driven, experience-based education can be improved and it can be used in a wide variety of sectors to further expand the workforce. Incorporating apprenticeships into two- and four-year degree programs would offer students both traditional learning and skills-based learning.

And this is particularly important for those students who learn better by doing. President Trump has seen firsthand the success of apprenticeship programs in the building trades where he's very familiar. The building trades invest

nearly a billion a year of private money into the apprenticeship program. President Trump has made clear his commitment to expand job opportunities here in America. Apprenticeships is one very important way that President Trump will fulfill that promise.

And again, I'm very excited to work with Ivanka Trump and Reed Cordish in the Office of American Innovation as this program goes forward.

After speaking briefly about the program, Acosta took questions from the press. You can see those exchanges in the video clip above. {eo}