Introduction

Across the world, the nature of work has evolved and is continuing to do so. In the United States, change is taking place on multiple fronts. American entrepreneurs are attempting to promote innovation by developing new businesses and creating opportunities within the “entrepreneurial economy.” American workers are learning new skills and pursuing training opportunities that will prepare them not only for jobs in the entrepreneurial economy, but also for many other jobs of the future.

Americans are already looking forward and thinking about the future of work. Today, technological advancements are actively contributing to our prosperity. In the healthcare industry, new technologies enable provision of high-quality medical treatment, which in turn alleviates injuries and illnesses experienced by many workers. In the transportation sector, use of mobile applications by businesses and entrepreneurs is transforming how people and goods move across the country. In the manufacturing sector, new technologies have encouraged businesses to modernize their facilities, streamline operations, and offer incentives to workers who have advanced technical skills.

In today’s rapidly changing economy, it is more important than ever to prepare workers to fill existing and newly created jobs and to prepare workers for the jobs of the future. In the United States, we are increasingly focused on creating strong linkages between our workforce and educational systems, as well as ensuring greater collaboration with business. These linkages are crucial in helping ensure the needs of businesses are met while at the same time providing opportunities for workers to earn the credentials and workplace skills required to obtain access to high-paying jobs.

USDOL Strategic Priorities

As part of the U.S. Department of Labor’s (USDOL) efforts to help Americans develop the skills required for the jobs of today and tomorrow, we are working to make our programs more flexible and to foster innovation at every level. Examples include: 1) expanding opportunities for work-based learning, work-readiness and career pathway training strategies that lead to the portability of licenses and industry-driven credentials; 2) connecting employers with skilled workers through customer-centered business services and effective partnerships; 3) establishing and expanding access to apprenticeships; 4) improving effectiveness and efficiency of workforce programs through flexibility in addressing state and local needs; 5) removing unnecessary regulations; and 6) providing appropriate oversight to ensure quality services and results.

High-Quality Public Workforce System

USDOL’s suite of workforce development programs raise the competitive advantage of millions of American workers through high-quality employment assistance, training, access to labor market information, and income maintenance services. These programs and services are provided through our nationwide network of over 2,400 American Job Centers (AJCs), which strategically bring together private and public partners in regional economies across the country to meet the needs of employers and job seekers. Businesses are engaged as strategic leaders of state and local workforce development boards; as partners that help identify and address workforce skill needs and skill gaps; and as customers who receive services to recruit and hire
skilled workers. USDOL’s workforce programs also assist hard-working Americans to find good jobs and careers by providing opportunities to increase their skills and connect to jobs. These programs serve individuals across skill and experience levels with diverse employment needs, such as individuals transitioning between careers, challenged youth, veterans, persons with disabilities, and older workers.

**Expanding Apprenticeship Opportunities**

As the nature of work continues to change, it is clear that we must also change our approach to preparing our workforce for the workplaces of the future. In the United States, this is perhaps most visible in one of USDOL’s top priorities – expanding apprenticeship opportunities. Apprenticeship systems must become more flexible to allow key stakeholders to adapt to changes in technology and to evolve to meet the skills demanded by employers.

President Trump proposed the establishment of industry-recognized apprenticeship programs in his June 15, 2017, Executive Order 13801 on Expanding Apprenticeships in America as a strategy for rapidly expanding apprenticeships throughout all sectors of our economy. Currently, registered apprenticeship programs that are regulated by USDOL and state apprenticeship agencies provide occupational training to only 0.3 percent of the American workforce, and the overwhelming majority of those registered programs are limited to job preparation in the traditional trades, such as construction.

If apprenticeships are to accelerate and flourish in critical sectors, such as advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, and healthcare, we must develop a complementary system of apprenticeship that can rapidly scale the number of apprenticeships and spread them to new and cutting-edge occupations and to underserved populations. Such industry-recognized apprenticeship programs would enable non-governmental third parties, such as trade and industry groups, companies, non-profit organizations, unions, and joint labor-management organizations, to provide recognition to programs on an expedited basis, without sacrificing program quality or rigor.

USDOL has convened a 20-member Taskforce on Apprenticeship Expansion, which has already met three times since last fall. The Task Force will identify strategies and proposals to promote apprenticeships, especially in sectors with too few apprenticeship programs and attract more businesses to participate in this well-proven work-based learning model. USDOL looks forward to sharing these recommendations and cultivating effective partnerships to prepare our workforces for a rapidly changing future and a dynamic and competitive global economy.

**Conclusion**

As the United States continues its ongoing efforts regarding the future of work, and strives to help businesses and workers succeed, we are seeking to forge new partnerships, learn what works in other countries, and identify best practices. We look forward to discussing ongoing efforts regarding the future of work at the G7 and other international fora.