

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 5, 2019

The Honorable Nita Lowey
House Appropriations Committee
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Lowey and Ranking Member Granger,

As Co-Chairs of the New Democrat Coalition (NDC) Future of Work Task Force, we offered and successfully passed amendment 288 to H.R. 2740, the Labor-HHS appropriations bill, to encourage the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to modernize how it forecasts and measures labor market trends and better capture the current technological advancements and economic change our workforce is undergoing. We thank you for your support of this important effort to better protect and advance the interests of American workers and grow the U.S. economy.

We are facing a moment of immense economic change driven, in part, by rapid technological advancements and innovations in areas such as artificial intelligence. Already, these innovations are reshaping entire industries, giving rise to new ones, and evolving how Americans work. We are committed to promoting policy solutions that address the unique opportunities and challenges of the 21st century economy. To do so, we need the right data.

Last Congress, the New Democrat Coalition conducted research and held a series of meetings with policy experts, labor, educational institutions, and industry, and released our Economic Opportunity Agenda: A Future that Works,¹ which explored the impact of these technological and structural changes on the economy and workforce and put forward several policy recommendations. It became clear that the economy and nature of work will undergo significant changes, yet there is very little data and consensus as to what new opportunities workers may have, which jobs could evolve or become obsolete, to what extent the structure of work and participation in alternative work arrangements has changed, and how quickly the American workforce will need to adapt.

BLS does excellent and vital work tracking our labor trends and its projections, which are based on historical data, are very reliable in times of relatively predictable technological development. However, today's technological advancements and innovations could fundamentally alter the economy and work in ways that we have not seen in generations. In its current form, the way the Bureau develops labor market projections may not accurately capture future labor market trends, including the growth or decline of existing or new industries. Our amendment seeks to encourage

¹ New Democrat Coalition, 2018. "Economic Opportunity Agenda: A Future that Works."
<https://newdemocratcoalition.house.gov/policy/issues/a-future-that-works>

BLS to accept a wider and more forward-looking range of inputs into its projections, including potential labor market disruptions due to technological innovations.

Buttressed by these technological advancements and industry shifts, the way Americans work is already changing as alternative work, both as a means of primary and supplementary income, grows.² While we believe this trend can offer greater flexibility and opportunity to the workforce, it may also lead to less stability and security for many Americans. BLS has not had adequate funding to consistently conduct, expand, or make certain improvements to the Contingent Worker and Alternative Work Arrangement Supplement (CWS) to the Current Population Survey (CPS), our only federal tool to measure and understand the alternative workforce. In 2018, the BLS released its first CWS results in a decade, which concluded that the portion of the American workforce engaged in alternative work remained relatively constant over the last two decades. However, many labor market experts and economists believe the results may underrepresent the full extent and reality of the alternative workforce,³ in part because the CWS only measures primary alternative work.⁴ Our amendment seeks to encourage BLS to both conduct the CWS on a more frequent basis, as well as improve the survey to capture the broader trends in alternative work.

It is imperative that BLS modernize its economic and workforce measurements and methods to both better reflect the current changes in the nature of work, as well as more accurately forecast labor market and industry trends based on new and developing technological innovations. As policy makers, we must face the coming change and adapt to ensure Americans have the tools to seize new opportunities. If we do nothing, we risk being left behind. With more accurate data, we can develop policies that anticipate and respond to the true nature of this economic transformation.

We were pleased that this amendment was adopted during House consideration and respectfully request your support to retain this provision when the House and Senate go to conference on the FY2020 appropriations package. Fostering the welfare and success of one of our nation's most vital assets—our workers—is critically important. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with you to ensure that the American workforce is strong, secure, and competitive.

Sincerely,

² Bracha, Anat and Burke, Mary A. (2018), "Wage Inflation and Informal Work." Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/current-policy-perspectives/2018/wage-inflation-and-informal-work.aspx>

³ Shambaugh, Nunn, Bauer (2018), "Independent workers and the modern labor market." Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/06/07/independent-workers-and-the-modern-labor-market/>

⁴ i.e. Excludes workers who with primary traditional employment who are engaged in alternative work for supplementary income, such as a part-time employee at a fast food restaurant who drives for a rideshare company to adjust for schedule variability and lower wages.

Bill Foster

Bill Foster
Co-Chair
Future of Work Task Force
New Democrat Coalition

Lisa Blunt Rochester

Lisa Blunt Rochester
Co-Chair
Future of Work Task Force
New Democrat Coalition

Haley M. Stevens

Haley M. Stevens
Co-Chair
Future of Work Task Force
New Democrat Coalition

Chris Pappas

Chris Pappas
Co-Chair
Future of Work Task Force
New Democrat Coalition