

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 25, 2017

The Honorable Alexander Acosta
Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta,

Earlier this year, the New Democrat Coalition launched the Future of Work Task Force to investigate and propose policy solutions to make sure all Americans have the opportunity to succeed in the changing economy. The New Democrat Coalition is a forward-thinking group of Members of Congress committed to finding policy solutions for the 21st Century.

This summer, the Task Force held a series of public forums with industry, labor, and public policy experts to explore the new role of technology in the economy and the workforce. We heard a nearly unanimous position that the economy will undergo significant changes. However, it remains unclear as to which jobs could become obsolete, what new opportunities workers may have, and how quickly the American workforce will need to adapt to our transforming economy.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does excellent work to track our labor trends, and its projections are very reliable in times of relatively predictable technological development. However, these projections are based on historical data, and some of the technological advancements and innovations of today could fundamentally change our economy in ways that we have not seen in generations. In its current form, the way the Bureau calculates changes in the workforce may not be able to capture future labor market trends, leaving policymakers with little insight into the effects these changes will have on the workforce.

Furthermore, rapid technological innovation is already impacting the way Americans work. Our modernizing economy will bring greater flexibility to the workforce, but will also lead to less stability and security. The independent workforce accounted for 94 percent of total job growth over the last decade.¹ Despite this shift, the BLS has not had adequate funding to consistently conduct the Contingent Worker and Alternative Work Arrangement Supplement (CWS) to the Current Population Survey (CPS). For the first time in twelve years this fall, the BLS is set to release an updated version of the CWS, which measures the size and scope of the contingent workforce.

¹Katz and Krueger 2016. "The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995-2015." September. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22667.pdf>

We urge the Department to take the following steps:

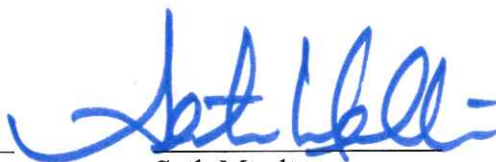
1. Make a long-term commitment to study the independent workforce. The Department of Labor should use available funds in FY18 to update and conduct the Work Schedules and Work at Home Supplement (WSS) to the CPS, which was last conducted in 2004. As you know, the WWS measures hours and flexibility of schedules in the workforce with attention to at-home, flexible, and shift work. As part of the Department's FY19 budget request, the DOL should prioritize requesting the institution of an annual supplement to the CPS with the revised CWS and other workforce topics conducted in alternating years.
2. Work with us to implement the spirit of the amendment Representatives Foster, Himes and Moulton offered to H.R. 3354, *Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2018*, which seeks to highlight the challenge the BLS faces in forecasting the future in this time of rapid technological change. This amendment was adopted by the House of Representatives, reflecting the need for the best data possible so that Congress can evaluate policy proposals to ensure our economy works for everyone. We request that the Bureau of Labor Statistics submit to Congress an estimate of the resources needed to make a range of estimates to account for technological displacement and begin to establish the range of scenarios for which we need to plan. Objective projections based upon empirical evidence are crucial to a debate that will be based on our different views of the role of government and its relationship with market forces. It will be difficult to make projections that accurately predict the future workforce, but with additional resources, the Bureau of Labor Statistics could model a variety of scenarios to help the government prepare students and workers for the future.

We are committed to helping our workers navigate the realities of this new and changing dynamic in our economy. 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.

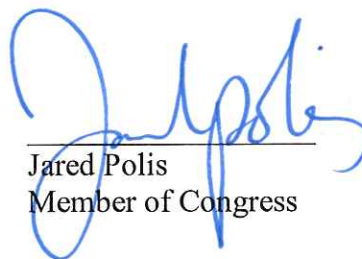
Sincerely,



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Jared Polis
Member of Congress