

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

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Strengthening Cities Through
Workforce Development



THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

May 4, 2026



Appropriations

Congressional appropriators are developing FY27 funding proposals for federal agencies responsible for workplace oversight, including the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The Administration's proposal includes reductions to DOL and NLRB while maintaining funding for the EEOC. House appropriators, however, have proposed a reduction for the EEOC, highlighting differences in funding approaches that may be addressed during the legislative process.

Appropriations hearings are underway in both chambers, with testimony from agency leaders expected in the coming weeks. Hearings for DOL, the NLRB, and the EEOC have not yet occurred. Recent leadership changes at the DOL, including the transition to Acting Secretary Keith Sonderling, may be a focus of upcoming discussions.

The EEOC is funded through the Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill, while DOL and the NLRB are funded through a separate bill that also includes the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, which is often subject to extended negotiations. The federal fiscal year ends September 30, and Congress may rely on short-term funding measures as budget discussions continue.

Secretary of Education Committee Hearings

On Tuesday, April 28, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Linda McMahon testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies on the President's FY27 budget request for her agency. During the hearing, subcommittee members raised questions about interagency coordination with the Department of Labor (DOL), proposed changes to K-12 funding streams, and support for federal student aid programs.

On Wednesday, April 29, McMahon was scheduled to appear for a briefing with the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) committee on the FY27 proposed education budget and agency priorities but did not attend. The closed-door roundtable between HELP Committee members and the secretary was cancelled after Senator Tim Kaine (VA) pressed for McMahon to appear publicly before the panel. The session was expected to address proposed structural changes within ED, including the redistribution of certain responsibilities to other federal agencies. Senator Kaine and HELP Committee Chairman Bill Cassidy (LA) publicly differed on the circumstances surrounding the cancellation and next steps for congressional oversight.

[Click here](#) to access a recording of Secretary McMahon's Appropriations Subcommittee hearing.

Department of Labor

Acting DOL Secretary Keith Sonderling has completed his senior team as the agency moves beyond the tenure of Lori Chavez-December, with Courtney Walter serving as chief of staff. Walter worked at Labor in President Donald Trump's first term, including at the solicitor's office. Cynthia McKnight, who served as Sonderling's chief of staff when he was deputy secretary, will be one of Walter's deputies. She also worked for Sonderling during his tenure at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Garrett Buttrey will be the other deputy chief of staff. Buttrey was chief of staff and senior policy adviser at the Wage and Hour Division under Administrator Andrew Rogers. Prior to joining the administration, Buttrey worked as an aide on the Senate HELP Committee. Finally, Joseph Burgese is working as a senior adviser in the secretary's office. He also worked in the Wage and Hour Division, as well as chief of staff for DOL's Office of Public Liaison.

Meanwhile, last week the White House pulled Daniel Bonham's nomination to lead DOL's congressional affairs office. He had been going through the approval process under Chavez's-DeRemer.

LIFT AI Act

On Tuesday, April 28, Senators Adam Schiff (CA) and Mike Rounds (SD) introduced the bipartisan legislation, Literacy in Future Technologies Artificial Intelligence (LIFT AI) Act, to increase AI literacy in schools and prepare students for workforce changes driven by emerging technologies.

The bill would establish a grant program within the National Science Foundation to support the development of K-12 AI literacy curricula, evaluation tools, and research on effective teaching methods. It also includes funding for professional development to help educators and school leaders build AI knowledge and integrate it into classroom instruction.

Additional provisions support the creation of hands-on learning tools, incorporation of AI concepts into existing curricula, and development of methods to assess student proficiency. Companion legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives.

[Click here](#) to access the full press release.

Living Wage for All Act

On Tuesday, April 28, Congresswoman Delia Ramirez (IL), along with a group of Democratic lawmakers, introduced the Living Wage for All Act to increase the federal minimum wage to \$25 per hour.

The legislation would phase in the increase over time, requiring large employers — defined as those with at least 500 employees or \$1 billion in annual revenue — to reach the \$25 threshold by 2031, while smaller employers would have until 2038. The federal minimum wage is currently \$7.25 per hour, a rate established in 2009, although many states have enacted higher minimum wages. The bill also includes provisions to index the minimum wage to broader wage growth to help maintain its value over time. In addition, it would eliminate subminimum wages for tipped workers, youth workers, and workers with disabilities, establishing a single minimum wage standard across all worker groups.

[Click here](#) to access the press release on the bill.

Apprenticeship Legislation

On Monday, April 27, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Chairman Bill Cassidy (LA) introduced two bills aimed at expanding apprenticeship opportunities - the Streamlining Timely Apprenticeship Registration and Transparency (START) Act and the Apprenticeship Data Value Improvements to Create Employment (ADVICE) Act.

The START Act, introduced with Senator Jim Banks (IN), establishes timelines for state apprenticeship agencies to act on applications, requiring decisions on complete applications within 90 days and responses to incomplete submissions within 30 days. The bill includes enforcement mechanisms to encourage timely processing and increase accountability.

The ADVICE Act, introduced with Senator Tommy Tuberville (AL), focuses on strengthening data collection and analysis for apprenticeship programs. It enables states and program sponsors to track outcomes such as wages, retention, and completion rates, supporting evaluation and replication of effective models.

In addition, Senator Cassidy requested that the U.S. Government Accountability Office conduct a study on barriers to establishing a new apprenticeship program.

[Click here](#) to access the full press release on both bills and the letter from Senator Cassidy to the GAO.

Workforce Data Enhancement Act

On Monday, April 27, Senators Roger Marshall (KS) and John Hickenlooper (CO) reintroduced the bipartisan Workforce Data Enhancement Act, aimed at strengthening how workforce data

is collected, shared, and analyzed across states. The legislation would make funding for the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) permanent, providing consistent support to State Workforce Agencies and training providers to better measure program performance and long-term employment outcomes.

It focuses on improving statewide longitudinal data systems that connect education, workforce training, and labor market outcomes. It promotes standardization, transparency around skill needs, and expanded use of data to inform decision-making by employers, educators, workers, and policymakers.

[Click here](#) to access the press release on the legislation.



U.S. Department of Labor Celebrates National Apprenticeship Week 2026

The U.S. Department of Labor announced the start of National Apprenticeship Week, an annual celebration of this proven path to rewarding careers. The 2026 National Apprenticeship Week features 2,700 planned apprenticeship events and proclamations nationwide, unified under the theme, "America at Work: Making America Skilled Again through Registered Apprenticeship." Running from April 27-May 2, this year's National Apprenticeship Week theme reflects the prominence of Registered Apprenticeships as a key strategy to ensure the American worker is equipped for the skilled jobs of today and tomorrow.

[Click here](#) to access the full press release.

Apprenticeships Offer a Path to Success for Young Workers of All Abilities

Blog post written by DOL ODEP Assistant Secretary Julie Hocker: The earliest stages of a young American's career can often be the most formative. Our first experiences with paid work and job training help us build skills, courage, and the know-how to navigate the working world. I, too, began my career with early, paid work experiences that helped me develop marketable skills and professional confidence. In high school, I worked in a job training program in local government before taking on internships here in Washington, D.C. at the Department of Health and Human Services and at the White House. These early opportunities set expectations high and opened the doors to a meaningful, fulfilling career.

[Click here](#) to access the full blog post.

U.S. Department of Labor Launches Website to Build Artificial Intelligence Skills, Expand AI-Focused Registered Apprenticeship Programs

On Wednesday, April 29, the U.S. Department of Labor announced the launch of its AI in Registered Apprenticeship Innovation Portal, a one-stop resource for organizations looking to build artificial intelligence literacy and develop AI-focused Registered Apprenticeship programs.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.

Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 09-25

On Tuesday, April 28, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) released the Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) *Work Opportunity Tax Credit Initial Funding Allotments for Fiscal Year 2026*.

[Click here](#) to access the full TEGL.

Initial Jobless Claims

In the week ending April 25, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 189,000, a decrease of 26,000 from the previous week's revised level. The previous week's level was revised up by 1,000 from 214,000 to 215,000.

[Click here](#) to access the full report.



Philadelphia Works RFP

On Friday, May 1, Philadelphia Works, Inc. (PhilaWorks) released a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking a One-Stop Operator interested in coordinating the service delivery of all required partners and core programs in the four PA CareerLink Philadelphia Centers, as well as that of the System-wide Services provider. Proposals are due Friday, May 29, at 5:00 p.m. EST.

[Click here](#) to access the full RFP.

Mayor Bass Issues Executive Order Directive to Increase Job Opportunities for Formerly Incarcerated Angelenos

Mayor Karen Bass issued an Executive Directive to promote and expand job opportunities for formerly incarcerated Angelenos. Executive Directive 20 leverages the City's hiring, procurement, and contracting powers by improving implementation and enforcement of existing policies, particularly the First Source Hiring Ordinance and Fair Chance Hiring Ordinance. Access to high-quality jobs reduces recidivism, creates new opportunity, and provides the stability upon which Angelenos can rebuild their lives.

[Click here](#) to access the full press release.

Mayor's Special Advisor Terri Weems Outlines How State Grants Will Help Detroit's Young Workforce

The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity recently announced the recipients of \$3 million in Young Professionals grants and \$1 million in Young Professionals Plus grants to provide youth and young adults with a meaningful introduction to the world of work, including career exploration and preparation, jobs skills, and earned income.

[Click here](#) to access the full press release.

Can Apprenticeships Rebuild the Learning Curve that AI is Flattening?

National Apprenticeship Week should do more than celebrate a promising workforce pathway. In an age of artificial intelligence, it should draw attention to a deeper problem. America is losing one of the main ways people become good at work in the first place.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.

"Green Jobs" Are Just Good Jobs Now

As recovery dollars began flowing from the federal government during the Great Recession, community colleges across California—like much of the country—began investing in workforce training programs in solar energy. But when some of those jobs never materialized, the colleges and students felt burned.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.

Why Workforce Development in Healthcare Depends on Better Educator Pipelines

Healthcare workforce shortages continue to strain systems worldwide, with the World Health Organization projecting a global shortfall of 11 million health workers by 2030. While staffing gaps are often framed as recruitment and retention challenges, the issue also begins earlier in the pipeline. Educational institutions face capacity constraints that limit how many future professionals they can train. Expanding the healthcare workforce at scale requires strengthening the pipeline of qualified educators responsible for preparing the next generation of practitioners.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.

Apprenticeships are the Workforce Solution We Need - Can We Finally Scale Them?

In today's fast-changing and volatile labor market, one of the oldest forms of education is back in fashion. Apprenticeships offer an answer to many of the most pressing questions facing the U.S. economy by enabling people to earn while they learn while also helping employers fill immediate talent gaps. It's no wonder, then, that apprenticeship seems to be one of the few areas of bipartisan consensus, with 88% of Democrats and 82% of Republicans supporting the expansion of apprenticeship programs.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.



New from U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Labor Announce Additional Grant Competition Under Elementary and Secondary Education Partnership

On Friday, May 1, the U.S. Departments of Education (ED) and Labor (DOL) issued the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 competition for the Competitive Grants for State Assessments (CGSA) Program. This announcement builds on ED's recent Convening on Strengthening State Assessment and Accountability, which brought together leaders from 43 states and 3 territories to highlight best practices and hear from experts on designing strong assessment and accountability systems.

[Click here](#) to access the full press release.

New from Urban Institute

With the Right Rule Changes, Workforce Pell Could Open Up Career Opportunities for Incarcerated People

Starting July 1, short-term workforce training programs will become eligible for Pell grants for the first time. Workforce Pell will extend federal aid to students in state-approved, short-term programs that offer education in high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand industry sectors or jobs. They mark one of the most significant expansions of Pell grants to date.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.

New from Aspen Institute

Upskilling Playbook: Getting Started with Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is one of the most powerful — and underused — tools for building a skilled, well qualified workforce, but many employers struggle to get started. This chapter cuts through the complexity by walking organizations through the key decisions and steps required to launch a successful program: assessing whether apprenticeship is the right fit for a given talent challenge, confirming internal readiness, selecting a target occupation, navigating federal and state registration, and identifying the right partners.

[Click here](#) to access the full publication.

New from New America

From Momentum to Maturity

This week marks another National Apprenticeship Week, a natural moment to take stock. It wasn't long ago that we were celebrating the first-ever Youth Apprenticeship Week and recognizing signs that the field was fast-evolving from a moment into a movement. Two years later, that movement is here, and it continues to gain traction.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.



Fact of the Week

A recent FlexJobs study revealed that nearly 1 in 4 American workers didn't take a single vacation day in 2025. The study found that heavy workloads, fear of falling behind, and pressure to appear committed are keeping millions of employees chained to their desks. Additionally, only 24% believe their manager would encourage a week-long unplugged vacation.

[Click here](#) to access the full article.



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