

Congressman John Tierney
House Education and the Workforce Committee
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I was disappointed with how the Education and Workforce Committee proceeded with WIA reauthorization last Congress. This Committee advanced a bitterly partisan bill. Not one Democrat supported it during the Committee mark-up. Dozens of outside groups – including the AARP, the Adult Literacy Council, the Voc-Rehab Administrators, the National Council on Aging, the National Urban League, the United Way, and others – voiced concerns about or objections to the Republican bill.

A real opportunity to work together and come up with a bipartisan product was missed.

During the legislative hearing on the Republican bill, I asked the witnesses whether it could be improved by aspects of the Democratic bill that I and Reps. Hinojosa and Miller filed. I plan to ask that same question again today. Every witness – including the ones invited by the Republicans – agreed that our bill could improve their bill. Unfortunately, no effort was made to make it a bipartisan process.

During last year's Committee's mark-up of the Republican bill, Mr. McKeon said that "bipartisanship is the responsibility of the majority."

He's right. That was last June. 7 months, and 1 election have passed since then – yet here we are again.

The latest iteration of the Chairwoman's WIA bill – which was announced last week but filed yesterday – continues to prioritize repeal, consolidation, and block granting over everything else. Just look at their press release on the bill! The first point they mention is how many programs their bill eliminates, as if that's the best and only measure for strengthening and modernizing the existing system. It isn't.

There is no evidence to support that the kind of arbitrary consolidation proposed by Chairwoman Foxx's bill will make the workforce system more coordinated or better integrated.

In fact, what seems more likely is that certain populations – such as youth, women, low-income adults, the disabled, and others with barriers to employment – will not receive the same level of service as they have had under current law. Let's take farmworkers as one example. Farmworkers are a hard-to-serve population who are mobile and who often have language barriers and unique educational challenges.

The Farmworker Program is one of the dozens eliminated by Chairwoman Foxx's bill. So how can farmworkers across this country expect to be served?

Again, it is disappointing that Chairwoman Foxx and Republican Leadership on this Committee chose not to engage in a constructive dialogue on how we can make this a bipartisan process just as it was in 1998 when WIA became law. It is particularly unfortunate given that our areas of agreement on WIA should outnumber our areas of disagreement. The millions of workers looking for jobs and the millions of employers searching for qualified candidates deserve better.

I look forward to the witnesses' testimony and thank Chairwoman Foxx for giving me an opportunity to make an opening statement.

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