

THE AMERICA WORKS ACT

WHY AMERICA NEEDS THE AMERICA WORKS ACT

The United States needs a strong technical workforce. Our country is facing a widening skills gap between older workers with advanced technical skills who will be retiring in the next few years and the younger workers who have not yet received adequate training to replace them. The benefits of industry-recognized credentials are widely known, but too often those credentials do not count toward educational requirements, do not match the needs of local employers, or require too much time to earn just one credential. Ultimately, the system ends up breaking down, to the detriment of trainers, employers and employees.

All stakeholders will benefit when they work together. The need for educational institutions, local employers and workforce boards to work together has increasingly been recognized throughout the country and especially in North Carolina. The Federal Government invests billions of dollars in workforce training programs through the Workforce Investment Act, Trade Adjustment Assistance and the Perkins Act, and this bill would ensure the most efficient use of those resources.

This bill encourages workforce system players to work together. The AMERICA Works Act will encourage businesses within national industries to come together and agree upon standards which define the skill sets they need in employees -- today and into the future. Once industries have agreed upon those standards, they can work with educational institutions to turn them into a workable curriculum with a tiered set of portable credentials. Local workforce boards could then certify that those training programs should be priorities for any workers seeking training through the existing federal programs.

HOW THE AMERICA WORKS ACT WILL WORK

The AMERICA Works Act modifies the Workforce Investment Act so that adults and youths at one-stop career centers will be encouraged to consider programs offering portable, national, industry-recognized credentials, as deemed appropriate by the local workforce board.

The bill modifies the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act by directing states and localities to prioritize portable, national, industry-recognized credentials within their plans, and to describe how participants prioritized these programs in the use of those funds.

The bill directs the Secretary of Labor to give priority consideration to programs offering portable, national, industry-recognized credentials within the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act.

BENEFITS OFFERED BY THE AMERICA WORKS ACT

The AMERICA Works Act benefits business. When businesses clearly identify skills they need in their employees, educational institutions can tailor their programs to teach those skills and workers will be better trained to meet those businesses' needs starting on Day One.

The AMERICA Works Act benefits workers. These tiered credentials benefit workers by offering several on-ramps and off-ramps on the way to a two-year technical degree: workers in training can exit the system having earned a basic, industry-recognized credential that qualifies them for employment, but without having completed the full two year technical degree, and they can easily re-enter the system later to move up within their field and work toward the more advanced degree.

The AMERICA Works Act benefits educational programs. Local educational institutes want to provide their students with the most useful skills possible. Open lines of communication between businesses, workforce boards and workers will better enable them to do just that.

The AMERICA Works Act benefits local economies. Local workforce boards will have the chance to determine which skills training programs are most valuable for their region today and into the future. Areas with well-trained workforces can more effectively lure new businesses. While this bill mentions manufacturing, it would benefit any industry that meets the criteria to be established by the bill.