

LOOKING FORWARD: AN AMERICA FIRST WORKFORCE AGENDA

Promoting Multiple Pathways to Career and Educational Opportunities

The spirit of the American worker is the very foundation of our Nation. When left to be free, creative, and industrious, there is no force more potent. From 2017 to 2019, the American workforce participated in one of the greatest and most robust labor markets in generations after experiencing one of the slowest economic recoveries in modern U.S. history following the Great Recession of 2007–2009. In this period, the skills-gap crisis and seismic shift in work challenged the “college or bust” mentality, propelling conservative leadership to promote a full range of career and education opportunities to prepare our workforce for the changing nature of work—a task that our country must continue to pursue to ensure that we are ready for the industries of the future. As we work to rebuild our economy and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) is prioritizing our Nation’s most critical asset, the American worker. AFPI will help restore American workers to their proper place, which is at the center of governance and policy alike. The class of Americans who made our Republic the greatest Nation on Earth deserve to be heard, valued, and in charge.

AFPI WORKFORCE POLICY PRINCIPLES

AFPI aims to advance the America First Agenda through pro-American working family policies and research. AFPI will review, research, and push policies that put hardworking Americans and their families first, bolster programs that provide opportunities for multiple pathways to good-paying careers and ensure that the private sector and the public sector work together to prepare high-school to mid-to-late career workers for the work that exists. AFPI understands the importance of ensuring Americans of all ages and backgrounds are positioned for opportunity and upward mobility. The greatest avenues to providing a robust and inclusive economy that encourages the dignity of work and opportunity for all, is through the following four main policy priorities:

- 1) Workforce Development Modernization and the Creation of Multiple Pathways to Family-Sustaining Careers: Due to the seismic shift in work resulting from COVID-19, millions of Americans need to be reskilled or retrained by 2030. AFPI understands the importance of modernizing American education and training by accelerating reskilling and the facilitation of innovation in workforce development. AFPI will develop policies and research focusing on opportunities and metrics to expedite American workers’ return to employment and upward mobility. States play an important role in creating multiple pathways to good-paying jobs and implementation of skills-based hiring practices and AFPI will prioritize working within the states to ensure American workers and those on the sidelines are prioritized as our economy rebuilds.



- 2) Destigmatization of Vocational Education: Career and Technical Education can provide students to opportunity to choose and pursue alternative pathways to good-paying careers that do not require an expensive or unnecessary 4-year degree. Expanding educational opportunities like CTE, is not only beneficial to the American worker but it is critical for the employers who have many jobs available and that need to be filled today. AFPI will drive Career and Technical Education (CTE) policies that destigmatize and expand vocational programs. The goal of these policies is to establish vocational education in every high school across the country. In 2018, over 30 million jobs were available and did not require a bachelor's degree ([Fishman, Ekowo & Ezeugo, 2017](#)). NFIB also found that 89 percent of their surveyed employers had major labor quality issues as it pertained to hiring in 2018.
- 3) Engage the Private Sector: Transformation happens beyond the government, which is why AFPI will educate and work with the private sector to commit to expanding programs that educate, train, and reskill American workers from high-school age to near-retirement so that they can be prepared for the jobs of now and the future while ensure they are in a more resilient position to succeed in a constantly evolving economy. AFPI will provide research on how the public sector can leverage the private sector to increase job opportunities and upward mobility for all Americans. AFPI will educate employers and states on the importance of layoff aversion and the need for employer incentives to reinforce it.
- 4) Increase Data Transparency: There is a critical need for a transparent and broad ecosystem that better guides current and future employees and provides employers the ability to identify when there is talent ready to fill available positions. As the U.S. labor market continues to increase job availability, there needs to be ready and skilled workforce to fill those positions. Increased data transparency for both the employee and the employer is critical to that end. American workers must have the ability to own their lifelong learning record while the employer must be able to verify and identify their skill set and educational achievements. AFPI seeks to help transform this fundamental issue and will provide research on the need for better data to help individuals and employers make better-informed decisions regarding careers and hiring employees. The United States has among the most resilient and most robust workforces in the world. In order to maintain and strengthen this resilience, AFPI understands the importance of preparing American students and workers with the necessary skills to fill the jobs that exist and prepare for the jobs of the future. This is not a role for the government alone; both the public and private sectors must come together to achieve greater outcomes for the future of work. AFPI will amplify how we can collectively cultivate pro-growth, pro-worker, and pro-family policies and effectively implement them to benefit and sustain our greatest asset—the American worker.