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Contact: Bernadette Green, (202) 225-2476

Grothman Supports Easing Regulations on “Earn-and-Learn” Programs

(Washington, D.C.) – Congressman Glenn Grothman (R-Glenbeulah) today supported apprenticeship, or “earn-and-learn”, programs and encouraged easing regulatory burdens on such programs during an Education and the Workforce Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee hearing.

Grothman questioned Michael Bennett, vice president of Cianbro Companies, a national construction services company.

Excerpts of Grothman remarks

Grothman: “There are restrictions on the number of apprentices you can hire per journeyman. Give me some examples of a job where it would be appropriate to have more apprentices per journeyman than right now.”

Bennett: *“A ratio may be you can have one apprentice or helper to one journey-level tradesperson. There are situations with many trades where that might be understated in terms of the conditions of the work, the hazards associated with the work. There are opportunities where a journey-level individual could oversee very safely more than one individual. In the same token, I can give you examples of where it is absolutely the correct thing to do to have a 1:1 ratio given the hazards associated with the work that needs to be performed. But there are many cases*

where you could have more. So, what that does to us, the restriction that puts on us is we can only develop so many based on how many journey-level craft people we employ.”

“You think that sometimes you should be able to hire three apprentices for every two journeymen?”

“I think there are situations where you absolutely could do that, yes.”

“Are there enough people out there that if you could hire more, you would? I guess I can think in my mind that there are two reasons we don’t have enough people in trade: you could say the amount of people that are going in, but you could also say from what you’re telling me that if you could hire more apprentices, you could get people through the program quicker. Do you believe we could get more people through the program if you could sometimes hire more apprentices?”

“I believe you could, and that’s one of the distinctions of what are the restrictions in a registered apprenticeship program; that would be one of them. Compared to, or contrast with, a non-registered program. We don’t have to have that ratio.”

“In your testimony, you refer to unnecessary requirements of registered apprenticeship programs that sometimes waste taxpayer money. Could you give me examples of that and what you think we can do to improve things a little?”

“We’re a federal contractor and we perform work under the Davis-Bacon Act, and on those projects – just a hypothetical – if it were a \$30 million project, and let’s say the contract required that for every \$1 million worth of work, you’d have to have an apprentice. Typically, an apprentice is making 50 percent of the journey-level wage. If you don’t have a registered apprenticeship program, that work still needs to be performed. You would end up putting journey-level professionals in those apprenticeship spots, and you will pay the journey-level wage on those projects. Where that ends up becoming expensive to the client, the state or federal government, is when you’re paying wages for journey-level folks in an apprentice-level program that’s unnecessary. And, you’re not developing a future workforce. We hear that the registration process can be fairly simple[...] There are projects where we’re reacting today and sending people to another state to go to work, and we may not be registered in that state. In fact, we may have never worked in that state before. The time that it takes to get registered – that’s where some of the hurdles come into play for us as a national contractor.”

“You talked about the things you do to ensure worker safety, and they’re all excellent qualities to have in a business. It’s safe to say we need more companies like yours. That being said, you were also particularly critical of the rigidity of the DOL’s registered apprenticeship programs and the fact they don’t always meet the needs of industry. Could you elaborate on that a little bit more?”

“Some of the rigidity that’s within those programs, in terms of the time, what consists of a registered program, and so in our world [...] As we developed a skilled-craft professional, that individual – I’ll just use carpenter as an example – when someone goes through our program,

that carpenter is also going to be provided with equipment operation skills, either to move material from point A to point B. They're going to be taught equipment operation skills that might allow them to access a work area like aerial lifts. They could also be taught rigging skills because that material they need to move needs to be rigged in such a way that it's done safely and can be moved safely. In our world, that is what a skilled program would look like and consist of – it's not a one-dimensional. That carpenter needs finished work, framing, but they're going to be a form carpenter on a bridge. So there are restrictions within in there where there are things we have to teach, which costs money and takes time and energy, that will never be applied on a project.”

Click [here](#) to view Grothman's full remarks (beginning at 2:07:40).

Background

Registered apprenticeships are programs registered with the Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Apprenticeship or a state office of apprenticeship.

Under the Obama administration, the DOL issued regulations requiring registered apprenticeships to meet 26 specific requirements relating to program design, and required these programs adhere to apprenticeship-specific equal employment opportunity regulations.

There is no concrete definition of what constitutes a non-registered apprenticeship, but these programs are estimated to comprise more than 80 percent of all apprenticeship programs.

Some businesses have found the registered apprenticeship model simply does not work for them because the DOL is allowed to dictate the skills the business must provide to apprentices in specific industries. These businesses prefer to structure apprenticeship programs in the manner they find most effective to prepare apprentices for employment

The DOL's registration system is one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't work in reality, with less than half of earn-and-learn programs choosing to register their programs with the department. Earn-and-learn programs should be flexible, and allow employers to innovate without interference from Washington.

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U.S. Rep. Glenn Grothman is serving his second term representing Wisconsin's 6th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Link to the release: <https://grothman.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=363>