



# OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

**Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)**

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Hearing

*Building Back Better: Investing in Improving Schools, Creating Jobs, and Strengthening Families and our Economy*

Zoom

Wednesday, April 28, 2021 | 10:15 a.m.

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Today, we are gathered to discuss how substantial investments in the infrastructure of our schools, workforce, and communities will help overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and build back a better economy for all Americans.

We are finally starting to defeat this deadly pandemic. Roughly three million people are getting vaccinated every day and most people can get a vaccine in less than 24 hours; the economy created more than 900,000 jobs in March; and 95 percent of schools are open for either full-time, in-person instruction or a hybrid of in-person and remote schooling.

Despite the many reasons for optimism about America's future, we cannot ignore the ongoing risks that this pandemic is posing for students and workers.

Millions of displaced workers remain unemployed without the skills needed to find good-paying jobs; schools are unable to ensure the safety of students and staff due to hazardous and outdated facilities; families are finding it even more difficult to find safe and affordable child care; and the rising cost of higher education continues to restrict opportunities for countless students.

These challenges have hit some communities harder than others. This is particularly true for low-income individuals and people of color who entered the pandemic with inadequate access to quality child care, education, health care, and workplace protections.

Over the last year, the Committee has work to protect the lives and livelihoods of our constituents. But we cannot be satisfied with a return to the pre-pandemic status quo. We have the responsibility to build back an even better economy.

Last month, President Biden unveiled the American Jobs Plan, which proposes a range of investments to improve the infrastructure of our nation's child care centers, schools, and workforce.

This plan invests in our chronically underfunded public workforce systems by providing \$100 billion for apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, sector-based training, and programs to help displaced workers build the skills for new careers. It ensures a more equitable recovery for workers with barriers to employment by expanding re-entry programs and subsidizing employment, especially for disconnected youth.

This proposal reflects key elements of the *Relaunching America's Workforce Act*, which would invest \$15 billion to help workers quickly re-enter the workforce, as well as the bipartisan *National Apprenticeship Act of 2021*, which the House passed earlier this year.

The President's proposal ensures school facilities are safe for students and staff by investing \$100 billion to repair outdated and hazardous infrastructure at high needs schools. This reflects the *Reopen and Rebuild America's Schools Act*, which would provide \$130 billion to address the deteriorating conditions in our nation's schools and create more than 2 million jobs. In my district, some school staff are concerned about returning to campus – not just because of COVID-19 – but also because school buildings have had mold and other serious health hazards since even before the pandemic.

We must invest in school infrastructure so that students and school staff can learn and work safely.

The President is also proposing to expand access to safe and affordable child care by upgrading child care facilities and increasing our nation's child care capacity.

Moreover, we expect the President to soon propose a robust plan that will lower the cost of care for families. Even before the pandemic, too many families could not afford child care and more than half of all families did not even have access to quality child care. Last week, Congressman Sablan joined Senator Murray and I in re-introducing the *Child Care for Working Families Act*, which would increase child care capacity, support child care workers, and ensure that all working families can afford quality care.

Finally, President Biden is seeking to boost our nation's community colleges, which play a critical role in helping underserved students access job training and higher education. Unfortunately, these institutions have faced severe enrollment declines and funding cuts. In response, the President's proposal modernizes community college infrastructure to ensure they have the capacity and resources needed to serve students and jobseekers. We further expect the President to release a proposal to make community college tuition-free and incentivize state reinvestment in higher education. This mirrors the *America's College Promise Act*, which Congressman Levin and I introduced this week.

Today, my Republican colleagues may argue that these proposals are unnecessary, unrelated to infrastructure, or maybe too expensive. These arguments are unrelated to the actual needs of the American people.

Working parents do not care if access to child care is labeled as infrastructure — they care about having a safe, enriching place for their children to grow and learn while they work.

Unemployed and underemployed workers do not care if job training programs are branded as infrastructure — they care that investments in job creation are paired with investments in the training they will need to access those good jobs.

Our students, parents, and school staff do not care if school buildings or community colleges are called infrastructure — they care about whether or not all students have access to a quality education.

Today, I hope we can come together to discuss solutions that will improve the quality of life in our communities and help build back a better economy.

With that, I thank our witnesses, again, for being with us today. I am now pleased to yield to the Ranking Member, Dr. Foxx, for her opening statement.