

**Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Fitzpatrick**  
**Committee on Small Business**  
**Hearing: “Workforce Development: Closing the Skills Gap”**  
**February 26, 2018**

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Good morning. I call this hearing to order.

Thank you for joining us at today’s Committee on Small Business field hearing in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

Currently, the United States economy is improving, with relatively low unemployment and increased job creation. Yet in this time of economic prosperity, many small businesses and numerous industries are struggling to find qualified workers. This lack of qualified applicants is commonly referred to as the skills gap. During times of economic growth, small businesses struggle to compete with large corporations in attracting qualified candidates. Similarly, as baby boomers retire, certain industries are finding fewer workers entering the industry, making it difficult to maintain a steady labor force and resulting in unfilled jobs. Manufacturing is arguably the industry most affected by the skills gap.

How does the skills gap affect us in Pennsylvania? There are nearly one million small businesses exist in our state. Those businesses employ almost 50 percent of our workers. An additional 10 percent of the state’s workforce is employed by one of the roughly 15,000 manufacturing firms operating here. If left unaddressed, the skills gap could not only impact these businesses and workers, but it may also lead to significant economic spillovers throughout the state in general. Addressing this issue demands our attention now.

Today’s hearing will allow us to hear from a panel of expert witnesses on how the skills gap is currently affecting our state. We will also learn about areas for potential improvement within our existing workforce development programs. I look forward to a hearing from each of our witness today and having a productive conversation on this issue.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my colleague, Mr. Evans, for serving as our Ranking Member today. I have enjoyed working with him on the Small Business Committee and appreciate his dedication to the people of Pennsylvania. With that, I now yield to Mr. Evans for his opening statement.

