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**Heller on WIOA: Essential to Getting Americans Back to Work**

*Senate Passes Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Today*

**(Washington, D.C.)** – U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) today spoke on the Senate floor about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The bill, which takes long-overdue steps to modernize our workforce investment system, provides job training and workforce investment programs that are essential for getting Americans back to work.

[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AU47yKXPUx8)

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**Below are his remarks, as prepared:**

“Mr. President, I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers of Congress for their efforts on the important legislation before us, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. I would especially like to thank Senators Isakson, Murray, Alexander, and Harkin for their leadership on this issue, and for working with our colleagues in the House of Representatives to craft this compromise. I am pleased that Congress has come together in a bipartisan manner to address the most pressing issue we face as a country, which is the need to restore our country’s economic health.

“We have a responsibility here in Washington to ensure that the needs of American workers, businesses, and jobseekers alike are being met. I believe we need a two-pronged approach to this problem: One, full-fledged efforts to grow the economy and create new jobs; two, a temporary safety net that helps people unable to secure a job in this current economic environment.

“The bill now in front of us is a much-needed effort to reauthorize and streamline the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which is the primary federal law concerning job training and workforce development programs. The services offered through the WIA system – job search assistance, career counseling, skills training, and on-the-job training – are a critical part of the effort to grow our economy and ensure that workers are prepared for the job market. Importantly, these programs are coordinated at the state and local levels to ensure that the unique needs of our communities are appropriately addressed.

“The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act takes some long-overdue steps to modernize our workforce investment system. It eliminates fifteen programs that have been identified as duplicative or ineffective. It removes twenty-one burdensome federal mandates on state and local workforce boards. It promotes state and local control and improves flexibility so that we can better respond to changes in our workforce or economy. It also improves accountability and transparency measures to guarantee that these programs are operating effectively.

“Given that this law has been due for reauthorization for more than ten years, providing states and local communities with the flexibility they need is vital to ensuring economic stability. We clearly can’t depend on the federal government to provide workers and businesses with timely solutions to help our workforce, so I am pleased that this legislation puts much of that control back where it belongs.

“The need to reauthorize these important programs is perhaps no more apparent than in my home state of Nevada. Our state was one of the states hit hardest by the economic downturn, and though we’re slowly recovering, we still have a long way to go. Industries that thrived for many years suddenly stalled, leaving thousands of workers out of jobs. Nevada had a double-digit unemployment rate for four and a half years, unfortunately topping the charts at nearly 14% for several months.

“Over the past few years, I’ve spoken with employers and jobseekers back in Nevada to look for ways to restore the health of our economy and get Nevadans back to work. Surprisingly, I heard from many employers that they have job opportunities available – they want to hire more employees and grow their businesses, but they are having difficulty finding workers with the necessary skill sets. This “skills gap” problem isn’t unique to Nevada; in fact, there are millions of unfilled jobs throughout the country.

“With nearly ten million Americans still unemployed and looking for work, we must take steps to connect jobseekers with employment opportunities in in-demand sectors. I was proud to join Senator Joe Donnelly from Indiana in introducing the Skills Gap Strategy Act last year to develop a solution to this particular issue, and I am glad that the managers’ amendment before us today also reinforces some of these principles.

“The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is a bipartisan, bicameral piece of legislation that represents real efforts to get our economy back on track. Though no bill is perfect, and the nature of compromise means that not everyone gets everything they want, I am grateful for the work my colleagues have done in writing this bill. While I would have preferred to include efforts to provide stability for unemployed jobseekers by temporarily extending unemployment insurance benefits, I also recognize that these job training and workforce investment programs are essential in getting Americans back to work. I still firmly believe that our economic recovery needs a two-pronged approach that grows the economy and provides stability for jobseekers, and this bill is an important part of that equation.

“When the Senate is in session, I call constituents back in the state and ask them to join me for a telephone townhall. During one of these calls just last night, I asked Nevadans if they felt like the economy is improving. Of those who participated, 26 percent said yes, they do think the economy is improving, 13 percent said they were unsure and 60 percent said no, they do not think the economy is getting any better. On a ratio of 2 to 1, Nevadans feel that economic growth is lagging. We need to fix this and pass policies that will help turn this economy around. In the meantime, we cannot forget about the important social safety net.

“Make no mistake Mr. President, I have every intention of continuing to work with my colleague from Rhode Island to temporarily extend unemployment benefits for those seeking to work.  I was proud to once again team up with him yesterday to introduce a new unemployment extension bill that would provide five months of benefits with retroactive eligibility.  We will continue to work with our colleagues, here in the Senate and in the House as well as this Administration to pass this legislation and ensure that we continue to provide this temporary safety net while creating jobs.

“Again, I thank my friends in both the Senate and the House for their work on this much-needed legislation. This compromise effort proves that Congress is capable of working together on legislation to help our economy, and I am hopeful that this experience will encourage all of us to continue working together to pass more bills to grow our economy and create new jobs for the people of Nevada, and for all of the United States.”

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