



Durbin, Jones, Bustos Introduce New Bill to Invest in American Workforce

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Doug Jones (D-AL), along with U.S. Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17) today introduced new bicameral legislation that increases federal investments in worker training and helps prepare workers for the jobs of the future. The *Investing in Tomorrow's Workforce Act* would ensure that American workers have the skills needed to successfully navigate the transition into higher-skilled positions and in-demand industries. It has been estimated that nearly 50 percent of jobs in the United States could be at risk due to automation.

“Preparing American workers to take on the jobs of tomorrow will strengthen the middle class and reaffirm our standing as a global economic leader,” Durbin said. “An investment in America’s workforce is an investment in our nation’s economy, and I’m proud to introduce this commonsense legislation with Senator Jones and Congresswoman Bustos.”

“Manufacturing jobs are the backbone of Alabama’s economy. That’s why it’s so essential that we make sure workers have the resources and job training they need in order to prepare for the jobs of the future. This bill increases investments in American workers and provides resources for folks to learn new skills in jobs across all sectors of Alabama’s economy,” said Jones.

“Strengthening and growing our workforce has always been one of my top priorities,” Bustos said. “Today’s legislation will help meet the needs and support the success of the workers and job creators I’ve had the opportunity to job-shadow during what I call ‘Cheri on Shifts.’ We must continue to invest in the skills and resources our workers need to remain competitive and grow our local economy.”

Jobs that require knowledge of digital technology have tripled in recent years—the software industry alone supports more than 14 million jobs, a 19 percent increase over the past two years. However, investments in the training needed to transition workers

into these new opportunities are at historic lows. The United States spent just 0.1 percent of Global Domestic Product (GDP) on active labor market policies in 2015—significantly less than many European countries and less than half of the level of workforce investments made in the United States 30 years ago.

A 2017 study from Ball State University estimated that, broken down by county, between approximately 50 percent and 60 percent of the jobs in Illinois could be at risk of becoming automated.

“At least 60 percent of today’s jobs will be impacted by new technologies, which means 90 million workers will have to acquire new skills just to keep their jobs. This legislation addresses that challenge by expanding access to the training that workers need to get good paying jobs in growing industries like medical technology, IT and software, and advanced manufacturing. Eighty-nine percent of the public want our country to invest in retraining workers who lose their jobs due to automation,” said Katie Spiker, Director of Government Affairs at National Skills Coalition. “We applaud Senator Durbin, Senator Jones, and Representative Bustos for making critical investments that are not only responsive to the needs and expectations of the public, but also critical to America’s economic success in the 21st century.”

“As the benefits and challenges of the future of work, including automation, fundamentally shift our workforce, we need legislation like the *Investing in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act* to assist individuals at high risk for job loss. The legislation used proven local solutions like workforce boards to support these communities, building on the efficiency and effectiveness of our system,” said Ron Painter, CEO of the National Association of Workforce Boards. “We commend Senator Durbin, Senator Jones, and Representative Bustos for their leadership and willingness to work with us to craft this proposal and urging their House and Senate colleagues to move swiftly to enact this needed bill.”

Specifically, the *Investing in Tomorrow’s Workforce Act* would:

- **Study Workforce Training Practices:** The bill would direct the GAO to conduct a study of the barriers to providing, and opportunities for improving, training for workers in industries that are most likely to be impacted by automation.
- **Invest in Workforce Training:** The bill would create a grant program through the Department of Labor to support industry or sector partnerships in developing and carrying out training programs for workers who are, or are likely to become, dislocated because of advances in technology, including automation.

- **Expand Current Programs:** The bill would increase funding for National Dislocated Worker Grants and amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to ensure workers who are dislocated by automation are included in WIOA programs.

Along with Durbin and Jones, the legislation is also cosponsored by U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV).