The New Apprentice: President Trump's EO Says “You’re Hired”

June 16, 2017

In keeping with his pledge to promote high-paying jobs, President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order, “Expanding Apprenticeships in America,” on June 13, 2017. With a goal to equip workers with the skills to fill existing and new jobs as well as jobs of the future in our rapidly changing economy, this executive order also acknowledges that our educational systems and our workforce development programs are not effective and in need of reform. The wide-ranging executive order is designed to expand apprenticeships and promote effective workforce development programs while identifying ones that do not work in order to better utilize taxpayer resources.

In order to achieve these goals, the president charges the Secretary of Labor—in consultation with the Secretaries of Commerce and Education—to consider proposing regulations “that promote the development of apprenticeship programs by third parties.” Such eligible third parties could include companies, unions, joint labor-management organizations, trade and industry groups, and non-profit entities.

The regulations would undergo the notice-and-comment process in order to consider whether to:

1. determine how qualified third parties can recognize high-quality apprenticeship programs;
2. establish guidelines that such qualified third parties must or should follow to ensure that the recognized apprenticeship programs meet quality standards;
3. provide that an industry-recognized apprenticeship program may be eligible for expedited and streamlined registration under the Labor Department’s registered apprenticeship program;
4. retain existing procedures to register apprenticeship programs for employers that continue to use the system; and
5. establish review processes that consider whether to: (1) deny expedited and streamlined registration in a sector in which existing apprenticeship programs are effective already; and (2) terminate the registration of an industry-recognized apprenticeship program recognized by a qualified third party, where appropriate.

Promoting Apprenticeship Programs

The executive order also charges the Secretaries of Defense, Labor, and Education and the Attorney General to promote apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs for several groups including high school students, persons currently or
formerly incarcerated, and members of the country’s armed forces and veterans. It directs the Commerce and Labor Secretaries to promote apprenticeships among business leaders in various and critical industry sectors, including cybersecurity, health care, infrastructure, and manufacturing while the Education Secretary is directed to support community colleges and two- and four-year higher education institutions as they incorporate apprenticeship programs into their curricula.

Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion

The order creates a Department of Labor Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion and designates the Secretary of Labor as Chair and the secretaries of Commerce and Education as Vice-Chairs. This task force will number no more than 20 individuals who will represent companies, educational institutions, labor unions, and trade or industry groups as well as other designees by the Secretary of Labor. The mission of the task force is “to identify strategies and proposals to promote apprenticeships, especially in sectors where apprenticeship programs are insufficient.” It will submit a report to the president on initiatives to promote apprenticeships, legislative and administrative reforms that would promote their formation and success, best practices for creating industry-recognized apprenticeship programs, and effective strategies for promoting private sector initiatives in support of apprenticeships.

Excellence in Apprenticeship Program

In addition, the executive order directs the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the secretaries of Commerce and Education, to establish an Excellence in Apprenticeship Program within two years of the date of the order. This Excellence in Apprenticeship Program will seek information to recognize and commend efforts by a variety of entities to establish apprenticeship programs.

OMB Reporting

Finally, the order directs agency heads to report to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) any programs that their agency administers that promote workplace readiness and work skills. These agencies are to provide certain information about and evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. The goal is to promote programs that improve workplace readiness and skills development and to eliminate ineffective and redundant ones.

The Order’s Objectives

The president’s stated goal is to improve the readiness and employability of U.S. workers and to better match unemployed U.S. workers with open job opportunities, especially in the 350,000 manufacturing jobs that are currently unfilled. While the executive order will take time to fully implement, it reflects the Trump administration’s emphasis on expanding job opportunities for all workers, especially middle class jobs, while channeling taxpayer dollars into effective and successful apprenticeship and job training programs.

Another objective is to give these third parties greater flexibility in developing apprenticeship programs that meet industries’ workforce needs. The current apprenticeship regulations are complicated and prescriptive so it is anticipated that new Labor Department regulations would be more streamlined and beneficial for all participants.

The executive order was published in the Federal Register on June 20, 2017.