

# Solis calls job training ‘essential’

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Labor Secretary Hilda Solis shares a laugh with a congressman and community college students after testifying Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

(Allyson Byers/Medill News Service)

WASHINGTON — Labor Secretary Hilda Solis told a House panel Wednesday that job training is among the department’s top priorities for the coming budget year.

“The nation and the world that is emerging from the recession are different from the nation and the world that entered it,” Solis said in her testimony. “The key to American competitiveness lies in its workforce being poised to fully participate in the 21st Century

economy.”

In line with President Obama’s emphasis on America’s need to “out-innovate, out-educate and out-build our global competition,” Solis cited various job-training programs and the people who have benefitted, including a construction worker in Florida who learned renewable energy skills from a Labor Department-funded program.

“Our job training programs are essential to improving the job economy,” said Solis.

Solis also touched on the release of Obama’s budget Monday, saying America must make investments in getting people back to work but also “make difficult choices that will put [the] nation on a sustainable fiscal path.”

Under Obama’s budget proposal, Labor Department spending would be reduced by 5 percent.

Education and Workforce committee members expressed concerns over the budget cuts for the Office of Labor-Management Standards, which monitors U.S. union-management relations, while funds would be increased for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs, which protects workers abroad.

“Shouldn’t we be focused on ensuring workers in America are treated fairly before we worry about other nations?” Chairman John Kline, R-Mn., asked.

Solis responded that the agency has become more efficient and able to conduct more audits on companies, so it didn’t need an increase in funds.

Assuring a fair and safe work environment for employees is another area of priority for the Labor Department, Solis said. She cited the recovery of \$10 million dollars for over 16,000 Pennsylvania workers.

“While it is easy to forget in the midst of a recession, merely having a job is not always enough. We want these to be good jobs that pay fair wages, keep workers safe, and provide basic benefits. We’ll continue to enforce safety and health laws against those employers who are cutting corners,” said Solis.

Solis emphasized that these efforts not only benefit workers, but also businesses. She explained that it “protects law-abiding businesses from unfair competition against those who cut corners.”

Committee members raised a number of individual concerns during the hearing, so Solis and her staff will be meeting individually with any member who wishes to do so.