

Nadler Bill Will Help Employ Young Americans

James came to the Conservation Corps with a whole host of troubles: gang affiliation, homelessness, drugs, alcohol, anger problems, and language difficulties (English is not his first language). He had also dropped out of school. The Conservation Corps changed his life. He learned carpentry, roofing, plumbing, and irrigation. He showed up at work on time, and learned how to deal with family, work, and stress. James is now president of the Corps Leadership Council where he motivates other Corps members to participate in program activities, school, and mentoring. He plans a degree in electronics and a career in construction.

James's story is similar to thousands of stories in New York and across the nation, one of five million young people – our sons and daughters, cousins, nieces and nephews - who are out of work and out of school. That is why for more than two years, the Community Service Society, through our Working for Change Capitol Hill Forums in Washington, DC, have focused on creating an economic framework for “disconnected youth.” That is why H.R. 2497, introduced by New York's Congressman Jerrold Nadler, is so important to our community.

Transportation Job Corps

Congressman Nadler's bill, the Transportation Job Corps Act of 2009, addresses the issue of job creation for disconnected youth in the transit industry. The need for this legislation is evident in research by the Community Service Society which revealed that one in six young Black men in New York City are neither in school nor working. They are part of the 200,000 disconnected youth ages 16 to 24 in the city.

About one-third of America's youth – and more than half of minority youth – drop out of high school before graduation. Many of these young people have few skills that could provide them a place in the labor market. Enormous talent, intelligence, and positive energy are being wasted as these young people are left behind. This is damaging both to our communities and to the competitive strength of our country in a global economy.

Congressman Nadler's bill would create a career-ladder grant program within the Federal Transit Administration. The bill specifically targets disconnected youth for basic skills training and pre-apprenticeship programs for jobs in the transit industry.

A large percentage of the transit workforce will be retiring within the next few years. There is no pipeline of replacements on the horizon and, for the current workforce, relatively few programs exist to provide training to workers so that they can perform their jobs adequately, move up the career ladder, and help the nation's transit agencies operate at maximum efficiency.

The Transportation Job Corps Act of 2009 would provide basic skills education and pre-apprenticeship grants for educational institutions and nonprofit organizations to do outreach and provide remedial education for disconnected youth, preparing them for a career in the transit industry. There would be apprenticeship grants for transit agencies to develop programs for transit-related jobs, with a special emphasis on youth who have completed a pre-apprenticeship program.

The legislation would also provide transit worker education and retention grants to enhance training for existing workers so that they can keep their jobs - especially as technology improves and additional skills are needed -

and to advance their careers. Workforce diversity grants would increase education opportunities for those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and are underrepresented among transit management.

The bill would also create a framework for a joint management-labor partnership to identify national and region-specific skills gaps and train people for employment. Educational institutions, research organizations, nonprofit and youth experts, and other stakeholders would be able to participate in the process. The bill is supported by the Transportation Trades Department AFL-CIO and the Amalgamated Transit Union.

Prime Source of Jobs

The nation’s transportation and infrastructure sector has historically been a prime source of job creation. “As the federal government moves to address our economic crisis, it’s essential that we also invest in our transit workforce,” says Congressman Nadler. “Since the time of the New Deal, federal investment in public works has been a proven method of boosting a troubled economy, stimulating mass job-creation and, of course, developing and improving transportation and infrastructure projects.”

Given the poor state of much of America’s transportation infrastructure, a Transportation Job Corps could furnish many jobs for disconnected youth while providing a safer, more efficient, environmentally sound and sustainable transportation. This legislation is similar to New Deal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration that provided employment for millions of out of work Americans in the 1930s. These agencies developed hundreds of state parks and built 125,000 miles of roads and thousands of bridges, creating a legacy of hope and many landmarks that we still enjoy and use today.

The legislation proposed by Congressmen Nadler would help to provide the skills necessary for America’s youth to grow and succeed in our labor market. When our young people lack the skills that industries need and are unable to support themselves, we all bear the financial costs — a weaker economy, a smaller tax base, higher public benefits expenditures, and less productive neighborhoods and communities.

There is no more powerless group than young people sitting on a stoop in the neighborhood without any opportunity at success. In his search for a Supreme Court nominee, President Obama referenced that the nominee should give the “powerless a fair shake.” If we don’t give New York’s and the nation’s young people a fair shake, they are likely to become a lost generation.

Join the discussion on how we can improve the lives of low-wage workers by making your voice heard on our Turnstile blog at <http://turnstile.cssny.org/turnstile/>.

David R. Jones is president and CEO of the Community Service Society (CSS), the leading voice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers for over 160 years. The views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer. The Urban Agenda is available on CSS’s website: www.cssny.org.

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