

Remarks by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen at East Valley American Job Center in Mesa, Arizona

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As Prepared for Delivery

I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you to everyone for being here. It's good to be in Mesa today with Chairman Sellers and Mayor Giles to highlight what we're seeing at this American Job Center and across the country.

Over the past three years, the Biden Administration has driven a historic economic recovery. Economic growth is strong. The labor market is also remarkably healthy. We've created over 15 million jobs since the start of this Administration. The unemployment rate has been below four percent for the longest stretch in over 50 years. Real wages—wages after adjusting for inflation—have increased over the past year. Household median wealth has also increased: by 37 percent between 2019 and 2022. Families are putting their accumulated savings and extra income back into the economy. And we've seen other signs of strength too, like the record number of small business filings.

Inflation has also come down significantly since its peak, though the President and I know that the costs of key household expenses are still too high, so we're taking action. We've capped insulin costs for Americans on Medicare at \$35 per month and are fighting to keep health insurance premiums low. The Inflation Reduction Act is enabling investments that will lower energy costs. And we remain committed to making housing more accessible and affordable.

Today, I'd like to focus on one aspect of our economic agenda that's contributing to the progress we've made and will continue to make. I'll speak to the work we're doing to equip all Americans, whether or not they have college degrees, with the skills they need to get good jobs and fuel growth in key industries.

II. THE CHALLENGE

Over the past few decades, opportunity in America had become too concentrated on the coasts and in wealthier communities. Some communities had never gotten the investment they deserved; other communities had been left behind. And it's been too hard to get a good job, especially for Americans without college degrees. In the 1970s, three out of four jobs required at most a high school diploma. Now, two out of three jobs require more than a high school diploma. This holds back the majority of Americans over 25 who don't have college degrees.

President Biden and I know how much having a good job can mean for Americans across the country. A good job means being able to provide for your family instead of struggling to do so. It means not having to make hard choices between putting food on the table and getting health care. It means being able to buy a home or save for your children's education. The President and I are committed to making getting a good job a reality for more Americans.

This matters for the overall economy too. The Biden Administration is pursuing an economic agenda focused on fueling growth in strategic industries. Achieving this depends on equipping workers with the right skills to fill the jobs we're creating across the country.

III. BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ACTIONS

Returning to Work

Our work started with the American Rescue Plan, which helped rescue the economy from the depths of the pandemic and bring us to where we are today.

Workers can experience negative impacts long after a recession has ended. We saw this following the Great Recession, when the long-term unemployment rate took nearly a decade to recover and many workers experienced lower earnings once reemployed. Our Administration was committed to preventing this scarring from happening again.

So the President took decisive action. The American Rescue Plan helped keep Americans housed, businesses open, and state and local governments resourced. And we made sure American workers were at the center of the recovery. The American Rescue Plan's State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program made historic funding available to city, state, territorial, local, and Tribal governments. As of last December, governments had committed over \$13 billion of that to worker support. Funding has gone to over 4,000 projects, from unemployment aid to workforce development, helping avoid lay-offs of school staff and add

thousands of new positions in public health departments. This contributed to what has been the fastest labor market recovery in modern history.

Creating New Opportunities

Now, our focus on workers continues through our medium and long-term agenda. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act are fueling growth in new industries and spurring a renaissance in American manufacturing from coast to coast. Companies have announced over \$850 billion in new manufacturing and clean energy investments since the start of the Administration, including \$121 billion in Arizona. Semiconductors have been a particular focus here, with Intel and TSMC both expanding production.

Growth in these new industries means a need for new skills, from wind turbine technicians to solar photovoltaic installers to roles in the semiconductor and electronic component manufacturing industries. These skills aren't secondary to success—They're critical to it. Let me be clear: Here in Arizona and across the country, we need workers for the industries that will drive our country's growth and resilience. We know that Americans are ready to get to work and take advantage of these good jobs. They deserve the skills and training to do so.

Workforce development programs are helping bridge this gap, and what's happening in Maricopa County is a prime example. The American Rescue Plan has enabled the County to dedicate \$100 million to workforce support, including \$12 million for the apprenticeship program based here and at another American Job Center nearby. The program is strategically drawing on multiple sources of funding, combining state and local recovery funds with annual Department of Labor funding. And it aims to equip 3,000 residents for jobs in construction, healthcare, information technology, and advanced manufacturing.

This morning, I visited Mesa Community College, one of several community colleges partnering with the City of Phoenix to use funds to help prepare individuals for high demand industries in the Phoenix area, including through a specific program called Semiconductor Technician Quick Start.

And employers are helping too. TSMC, for example, is establishing a new semiconductor technician Registered Apprenticeship program, with plans to scale over time as business needs evolve.

We're seeing similar developments across the country. Due West of here, in Riverside County, California, \$2.5 million is going to build a workforce education center for training, including in advanced manufacturing. To the East in Ohio, the state is allocating over \$2 million for a workforce training center. And I started the year by traveling to the Midwest—to Milwaukee—where the American Rescue Plan and additional federal funds are enabling WRTP | BIG STEP to expand and modernize its training facility.

Key Priorities

Across the country, our workforce development efforts also reflect a bedrock value that animates President Biden's long-term economic agenda: reaching those who hadn't previously had opportunity. Many ARP-funded workforce development programs pursue targeted outreach efforts to build diverse pipelines. Many provide support for wraparound services that can be crucial for individuals from underserved communities being able to complete training.

And we're also focused on creating opportunities that actually make a difference in people's lives, which means making sure the jobs we're creating are good ones that provide a pathway to the middle class. The Inflation Reduction Act's prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements are key here. Unions matter too. Partnerships with unions can strengthen the link between training and employment, as I've seen firsthand in trips to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers facility in Las Vegas and at WRTP | Big Step. And union jobs are more likely to be good ones, with wages 10 to 15 percent higher on average and improved fringe benefits like predictable scheduling. We see these good jobs being created here in Arizona, which ranks among the top five states in terms of wages for semiconductor processing technicians.

IV. CONCLUSION

The President and I recognize that there is more work to do. Even though inflation has fallen significantly, bringing down costs for families is our top priority, from making owning or renting a home more affordable to making it easier to get a good education. As we look ahead, we're also working to create stronger and more accessible workforce development programs, to move forward the President's Investing in America agenda and prepare for emerging challenges shaping the future of work like new technologies.

These efforts are already well underway. As we see here today, we're building an ecosystem in which expanded, strategic workforce development is equipping Americans from all walks of life for good jobs in twenty-first century industries. We're expanding opportunity, for those with and without college degrees, here in Arizona and across the country. And American workers are in turn helping drive our country's growth and resilience.

Thank you again for joining me here today.

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