

CCD Employment and Training Task Force – Puzder Questions – December 19, 2016:

1. Our nation was founded on the principle that anyone who works hard should be able to get ahead in life. People with disabilities deserve the opportunity to earn an income and achieve independence, just like anyone else. As the new Secretary of Labor, what are your plans to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities?
2. In the press release announcing your nomination as the new Secretary of Labor, you said that “The president-elect believes, as do I, that the right government policies can result in more jobs and better wages for the American worker.” What will you do, once you are confirmed, to ensure that Americans with disabilities are included in the new administration’s economic agenda?
3. Overseeing policies and priorities that impact our nations’ workforce development system is among the many responsibilities of the Secretary of Labor. One of the target areas of Public Law No: 113-128 (the bipartisan Workforce Innovation and
4. Opportunity Act) was to expand opportunities for people with disabilities to enter the workforce by creating a more accessible workforce system and expanding opportunities for training or apprenticeships. How will you as Secretary build on the opportunities created by WIOA to empower more people with disabilities to enter the workforce?
5. In an op-ed entitled “[More Work, Less Welfare](#)” published in *The Hill* on June 22nd, 2015, you warned about the unintended consequences created by our nation’s social safety net. In your piece you wrote about how our system discourages “work rather than encouraging independence, self-reliance and pride.” More than 11 million people with disabilities receive government benefits. However, study after [study shows](#) that Americans overwhelmingly wants jobs, not more government benefits. How will you, as Secretary of Labor, partner with other leaders to expand opportunities for people with disabilities to avoid benefits and achieve independence through employment?
6. In that same op-ed, you also wrote about how the fear of the loss of benefits “can lock” people “into poverty by making the chasm between government dependence and independence too broad to cross.” [One 2014 survey](#) found that six out of ten people with disabilities “felt that loss of benefits is a barrier to employment.” How will you work with other federal agencies, state leaders and private sector employers to create greater opportunities for people with disabilities to have jobs?
7. In your *Hill* op-ed you wrote that the “only way to truly reduce poverty and finally get the economy going again for working-class Americans is to create greater opportunity for the economically disadvantaged.” In looking at the employment rates for Americans with disabilities, [we see significant variability](#) in such opportunities on a state-by-state basis. For example, over half of working age South Dakotans with disabilities are employed and in Iowa, 44 percent are employed. At

the same, in West Virginia barely one in four people with disabilities are employed. What will you do as Secretary to “create greater opportunity for the economically disadvantaged” including people with disabilities?

8. You have previously written about how, “in most states, Medicaid eligibility ends when annual income exceeds 138 percent of the poverty line.” Some states have adopted Medicaid Buy-In programs under Section 201 of Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA), to allow people with disabilities to work while not losing their health insurance. How will you as Secretary of Labor coordinate with your subordinate agencies at the Department of Labor and your colleagues at the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to support these efforts?
9. Companies including Amazon, Starbucks, Pepsi and others have shown that employees with disabilities are loyal, successful and help them make more money. If we find the right jobs for the right people it can and does increase the bottom line of companies. How will you work with leading private sector employers to showcase the talents of qualified individuals with disabilities? What will you do to better promote private-sectors solutions to the continuing challenge of jobs for people with disabilities?
10. In a May 2016 article for *Forbes*, you wrote about the “[extensive regulatory maze the Obama Administration has imposed on employers](#).” Among the many regulations promulgated by the Department in the past few years have been new rules for companies doing business with the federal government under [Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 41 CFR Part 60–741](#). One of the provisions of this new regulation was to encourage federal contractors to recruit, hire, promote, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities. Specifically, these rules created a utilization goal for federal contractors to have up to 7% of their employees be talented employees with disabilities. Will you order the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to rollback such regulations? Or will you work with that Office and federal contractors to continue working towards that goal?
11. [A 2014 report from the Americans Institutes for Research](#) found that “workers with disabilities who have at least a high school education earn 37 percent less on average than their peers without disabilities.” In fact, this wage gap increased with educational attainment, meaning that people with disabilities who do achieve a Master’s degree are paid a third less than their peers. What will you do address this wage gap?
12. If confirmed, you will become Secretary of Labor at a crucial time in our nation’s future economic history. In the years ahead, more and more Baby Boomers will age out of the workforce and automation will continue to accelerate. Nursing homes, hospitals and assisted living centers are expected to have [1.3 million job openings](#)

[by 2020](#). Further, there are currently 1.2 million open jobs in the fields of [Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics \(STEM\)](#). These are crucial and growing sectors of the American economy. People with disabilities bring unique characteristics and talents to workplaces that benefit employers and organizations. People with disabilities can work in hospitals, hotels, be super talents in developing computer software and in many other fields. What will you do as Secretary to tap into the diverse talents of Americans with disabilities?