

STEM Restoring Employment Skills through Targeted Assistance, Re-entry, and Training Act

STEM RESTART Act ([S.1297](#))

Introduced by U.S. Senators Jacky Rosen of Nevada and Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi

BACKGROUND

According to the Center for American Progress, nearly one in four women take a break in their career, and in the past year, four times more women than men dropped out of the workforce due to the COVID pandemic. Research published by The Harvard Business Review says that while 93 percent of off-ramped women want to resume their careers, only 74 percent manage to get any kind of job at all, and just 40 percent successfully return to work full-time. A Pew study also found that 62 percent of Black STEM workers say they have faced discrimination in hiring or promotion at their jobs, compared to just 13 percent of White STEM workers.

Overall, women and men of all backgrounds have had to drop out of the workforce in record numbers over the course of the pandemic. As the economy begins to recover, many of these individuals will want to return to their jobs, and many more may want to transition mid-career into more lucrative and stable STEM fields.

A SOLUTION

The bipartisan STEM RESTART Act provides small and medium-size businesses with funding for robust, paid, mid-career internships, known as “returnships,” for workers looking to return to work or transition to a new STEM career, with priority for underrepresented populations and rural areas. Studies show that mid-career internships or “returnships” are an effective way to address the difficulties of former STEM employees seeking to return to work to in-demand industry sectors.

These programs provide a probationary period and opportunities to obtain mentorship, professional development, and support as the participants transition back to work and advance in their career. “Returnships” allow an employer to base a hiring decision on actual work instead of just interviews and references. Many larger and Fortune 500 companies provide mid-career internships for returning technical professionals as an effort to close the gender gap and skills gap. According to the Small Business Administration, small and medium enterprises employ over 31 percent of the industrial research workforce, yet are least likely to have returnships.

U.S. Senators Jacky Rosen (D-Nev.) and Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) [first introduced](#) the bipartisan STEM RESTART Act in September 2020.

ENDORSEMENTS

Incubate, the STEM Education Coalition, AnitaB.org, the Society of Women Engineers, Microsoft, the Small Business Roundtable, and other organizations.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

- “The COVID pandemic has caused significant unemployment, especially among minority groups and women. Incubate supports the STEM RESTART Act, which will aim to bridge the employment gap among underrepresented populations in STEM, provide direct funding to organizations within STEM fields, and will prioritize ‘returnships’ to close the skills and hiring gaps,” said **Ashlyn Roberts, Coalition Manager of Incubate**. “If enacted, this legislation would increase opportunities for women and minority groups in the industry, create a stronger workforce, and ultimately facilitate more medical breakthroughs in the future.”
- “This bill will provide much needed support for getting more Americans back into the STEM workforce at a time when our country is poised to make unprecedented investments in the foundations of our shared prosperity – infrastructure, manufacturing, science and technology, and education,” said **James Brown, executive director, STEM Education Coalition**. “The RESTART Act is a really innovative concept whose time has definitely come.”
- “We are so pleased that Senators Rosen and Hyde-Smith are reintroducing the STEM RESTART Act,” said **Brenda Darden Wilkerson, president and CEO, AnitaB.org**. “AnitaB.org is committed to a future where the people who imagine and build technology mirror the people and societies for whom they build it. Such a future requires a technology workforce that intentionally includes women and supports their professional and personal aspirations. Many women find it necessary to pause their careers for myriad reasons—growing families, aging parents, assisting family businesses, or—a pandemic. This proposal would foster the development of re-entry programs that ease a transition back into technical positions and fields. We’re grateful for the STEM RESTART Act and hope it can be part of the conversation on Capitol Hill about how to help the country’s economy recover and how to get STEM workers back to work.”
- “The Society of Women Engineers (SWE) is so pleased to see the STEM RESTART Act reintroduced this year. In fact, as the country recovers from the economic fallout of the pandemic—fallout that has affected women in STEM careers disproportionately—this bill is needed more than ever,” said **Karen Horting, executive director and CEO, Society of Women Engineers**. “Before the pandemic, more than ninety percent of women STEM professionals who had to leave the workforce wished to return, but only forty percent were able to do so. There’s no doubt those figures have only worsened. SWE and its 41,000 members applaud Senators Rosen and Hyde-Smith for this bill, which recognizes the successes of existing ‘returnship’ programs and sees the promise of them as the country’s workforce needs all the STEM talent it can get. Companies that participate in similar initiatives ultimately hire eighty-six percent of participants. That result closes the STEM opportunity gap and creates quality jobs. Federal backing for such efforts, as proposed by the bill, will help small businesses looking for qualified talent to start similar programs. We should all do what we can to get women and the economy back to work. The country’s economic recovery needs initiatives like this one, and we look forward to supporting efforts to get this legislation to the president’s desk.”
- “Microsoft believes opportunities to develop new digital skills are critically important. The STEM RESTART Act will support mid-career workers interested in returning or transitioning to the STEM workforce increasing access to in-demand skills and jobs. We applaud this bipartisan bicameral legislation and thank Senators Rosen, Hyde-Smith, and Kelly and Representatives Houlahan and Baird for their leadership,” said **Fred Humphries, corporate vice president, Microsoft U.S. Government Affairs**.
- “This past year the American workforce has taken a disastrous hit, and the small business community, especially traditionally underrepresented communities, have suffered as a result,” said **John Stanford and Rhett Buttle, Co-Executive Directors of the Small Business Roundtable**. “Small Business Roundtable applauds Senator Jacky Rosen for her introduction of the STEM RESTART Act. This legislation will encourage ‘returnships’ to bridge the skills and hiring gap in STEM fields, provide funding to organizations within STEM fields, enforce worker protections, and will provide grants to local businesses. If enacted, we look forward to seeing increased representation nationwide among women and traditionally underrepresented groups in the STEM field.”