

The Federal Skills Act

Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL)

The Federal Skills Act would remove traditional education bias within federal hiring practices and expand federal workforce opportunities to qualified Americans with alternative education credentials, relevant experience, or demonstrated abilities.

The Problem: While the federal government is the largest employer in the nation with more than 2.1 million civilian workers, trends have shown that it has traditionally favored employees with bachelors or advanced degrees. Employees with non-traditional forms of education – including technical training, an associate degree, or other experiences outside of higher education – were hired at a decreasing rate by the federal government between 2010 and 2018, while college graduates were increasingly hired. Only one-third of Americans have a college degree, yet around 52 percent of federal civilian employees have college degrees.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated our nation’s unemployment rate. As Americans look for new opportunities, the federal government has an opportunity to modernize its hiring practices by equally considering an individual’s skills outside of a college degree and set an example for the private sector.

The Solution: The *Federal Skills Act* would help address federal government hiring bias while increasing employment access by removing unnecessary educational requirements in competitive service positions and replacing them with methods to assess candidates in a manner that do not rely on educational attainment. This bill specifically:

- Requires the Director of the Office of Personnel and Management (OPM), in consultation with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the head of each agency, to review and revise all job classification and qualification standards within the competitive service as necessary;
- Removes education requirements from federal employment under the competitive service;
 - Sets an exemption for positions that legally require a minimum education requirement to perform the duties (doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.)
- Requires position descriptions and job postings under the competitive service to be based on specific skills and competencies to perform the job;
- Improves the use of skills-based assessments by requiring the OPM Director to work with each agency to ensure candidates are not solely assessed on their education to determine whether the candidate possess relevant knowledge, skills, competencies and abilities for the position;
- Requires the head of each agency to develop and identify assessment practices that candidates must fulfill and that assessment practices must be evaluated continually for their effectiveness;
 - Agencies cannot rely solely on self-evaluations of the candidate
- Does not limit the authority of agencies to fill their vacant positions; and
- Does not eliminate or affect the student loan forgiveness or student loan cancellation options available to borrowers under federal law.

Background: This legislation is modeled after President Trump’s [Modernizing and Reforming the Assessment and Hiring of Federal Job Candidates Executive Order](#), which [Senator Rubio worked with then OMB-Director Russ Vought to develop](#). Representative Ted Budd (R-N.C.) introduced the [House companion](#).

Endorsing Organizations: Heritage Action, American Principles Project, and Freedom Works.