

**Testimony of Mr. Ignacio Salazar
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SER-Jobs for Progress National, Inc.
Senate Special Committee on Aging
United States Senate
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Testimony:

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Special Committee on Aging - I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you today. The training and re-training of the older worker is not a political issue- But a people issue, and the employment and training needs of the older workforce must remain a priority of this Congress and The New Administration.

For over forty-four years, SER- Jobs for Progress National and its network of partners have worked tirelessly to ensure that workforce development needs throughout our communities are met. Currently, SER National and its affiliate network provide services in the areas of education, employment and training and cadre of services focused on economic development, business growth and job creation. The SER Network remains steadfast in our continual effort to cultivate *America's greatest resource, people.*"

The SER Network consists of 35 affiliates operating in more than 200 offices in 19 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia- serving over One Million People Annually.

Additionally, SER National manages the training and employment needs of over 3,500 mature workers (55+) in the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. In its fifth year of operation, SCSEP is administered by SER sub grantees in Wisconsin, Florida, California, Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Rhode Island and Texas.

Today, there is a new crisis in the American workforce. This conflict, unfolding before us in the 21st century workplace, is being defined by a series of increasing generational collisions that are affecting American productivity. In similar fashion that other diversity movements have partially paralyzed the labor force—whether racial, religious, or gender-related—generational conflicts at work are causing dysfunctional results like reduced profitability, loss of valuable employees, poor customer service, and wasted human potential.

The former flow of power, authority, and responsibility from older to younger employees has been disrupted because of: significant economic downturn, changes in life expectancy, increases in the average individual periods of productivity, and demographic trends of the American workforce. In addition, changes in life styles, the distribution of highly desirable technological skills, and the possession of a knowledge base necessary for global competitiveness have created a jarring upheaval to the “natural flow” of career progression.

The “pecking order” is eroding and so is the social and physical separation of generations in the workplace. Upward mobility in the job setting is now facilitated by rapid access to information and the ability to disseminate such information in efficient fashion. The “gold standard” of a senior, experienced, applicant is no longer as valuable as in the past.

Experience alone is no longer an indicator or predictor of success.

The above factors are leading to an increase in the number of older workers being forced out of careers with no viable re-training mechanism currently in place.

The economic downturn has created an overwhelming demand for Federal and State Employment and Training Programs within the One Stop System. Programs offered through the Workforce Investment Act in partnership with Wagner Peyser services were never designed to serve the older worker demographic. Traditional WIA services tend to focus resources for services such as: Youth Programs, Young Adult Training and Dislocated Worker Training- leaving little or no funding available for the harder to serve older worker. In reality, the increasing number of One Stop Customers coupled with the specialized training needs of the Older Worker, make it apparent that the One Stop System is ill-equipped to meet the employment and training needs of the older worker.

In 2006, The Older Americans Act Title V Program or SCSEP was amended to allow for workforce skills training. This minor change in legislation has made a world of change for our SER SCSEP Participants. With renewed hope and an enhanced skill-set, our Older Worker Participants are finding better employment opportunities and are returning to the workforce with increasing success. We would suggest that funding be appropriated to provide workforce skills training to the older worker population who is currently ineligible for the SCSEP program. We feel strongly that short term training focused on the core-skills areas of: Language Acquisition for the limited English Speaker, Financial Literacy, Critical 21st Century Technology Skills, and Mature Worker Career Readiness training can create the pillars of success for the re-training of the older worker.

On behalf of SER-Jobs for Progress National and the millions of participants we serve, I would like to thank the committee and the chairman for the opportunity to present these recommendations, as we move forward in our joint mission of preparing America’s workforce for the future.