



THE VOICE OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION NATIONWIDE

Legislative Archives

Date: December 20, 2011

Title: Update on Important Information Regarding Adult Education

Dear COABE Members,

Please see the public policy advocacy updates below, and learn what you can do to advance adult education and literacy issues with Congress. Happy Holidays!
Jackie Taylor

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By Ellen Fern and Jackie Taylor

In this month's public policy advocacy update, learn more about the status of the budget and appropriations process for FY2012 and what this means for adult education; find updates and breaking news on extending Unemployment Insurance (UI) employment benefits and how it may impact undereducated workers, learn about new jobs legislation that includes adult education, and see more progress made on WIA reauthorization in the House.

- Budget and Appropriations
  - UI Alerts
  - WIA Reauthorization
  - Pathways Back to Work Act
  - Adult Literacy Advocacy—What this means for you

### Budget and Appropriations

Last week, harshly partisan accusations flew back and forth across the Capitol, with Democrats and Republicans blaming one another for various stalemates preventing members from leaving for the holidays. The unfinished “must do” items were formidable, including a budget for FY2012, an extension of unemployment benefits, finding a way to extend the 2 percent payroll tax holiday, preventing a sharp cut in Medicare reimbursements to physicians and numerous other policy issues that required action before year’s end.

Late Thursday evening, December 15, everything changed. The unseasonably balmy 60 degrees in the Nation’s capitol thawed the tone of discourse. The conference agreement for the FY 2012 omnibus appropriations bill that will fund two thirds of government agencies—including the Department of Education—was finally and signed by Democrats. It passed the House on Friday, December 16, and the Senate worked on Saturday, December 17 to approve the bill avoiding a threatened government shutdown.

The House also passed a short-term continuing resolution, set to expire on December 23. This is to give legislative staffs enough time to file the 1,200 page omnibus bill that will fund the government through September 30, 2012.

While the omnibus bill does not include many funding increases for education, it was more generous than anticipated in light of the sharp differences between the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) bill and the

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proposal put forth by House Subcommittee Chairman, Denny Rehberg (R-MT). The final measure also includes an across the board cut of .189% which will impact all programs. Small increases were included for Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA.) Most other programs were frozen at the FY 2012 level. This includes level funding for adult education state grants at \$596.1 million. EL Civics remains funded at \$74.8 million and national leadership activities remains funded at \$11,323,000.

The administration's signature programs—Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation (i3) and Promise Neighborhoods, were all funded, though not at the levels that matched the President's request. Modifications were made to Pell Grant eligibility provisions in order to maintain the maximum grant award including requiring a high school diploma, GED or completion of a homeschooling program to receive a Pell grant.

Literacy programs did well, with the Comprehensive Striving Readers program receiving \$160 million which includes funding for family literacy activities and a new Literacy program targeted to libraries receiving \$28 million. Though the House bill had eliminated funding for the Math Science Partnership Program, funding was maintained in the final bill at \$25 million below FY 2011. Similarly, funds for the Comprehensive Centers that the House wanted to reduce were included at last year's level along with funding for the Regional Education Labs.

### Unemployment Insurance (UI) Alert: Say No to Slashing UI for Undereducated Workers!

Senate leaders have been working behind closed doors on a measure that would extend the payroll tax cut and jobless benefits for two months while preventing a pay cut for doctors who treat Medicare patients. "They have agreed in principle to a two-month deal extending the payroll tax holiday, unemployment benefits and the Medicare issue that also includes a provision on a controversial oil pipeline the president said he would reject," according to CQ's Roll Call. This deal was passed by the Senate on Saturday. It's a clean extension of current law; Democrats did not get the expansion of the payroll tax holiday and Republicans did not get the substantial overhaul of unemployment passed in the House.

However, as of Monday morning House Republicans have revolted against their leader Speaker John Boehner and now say they will not vote for the compromise measure passed by the Senate on Saturday. This means that the payroll tax extension, along with the extension of unemployment benefits the Medicare physician reimbursement schedule, remain part of the ongoing drama in Washington. The questions remains...when will it end?

While gridlock remains, it does appear that the House passed bill, H.R. 3630, which included language that would deny unemployment insurance benefits to individuals who do not have a HS diploma or GED unless they

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are enrolled and making satisfactory progress in classes leading to one, will not be part of any compromise measure. Anti-poverty and economic opportunity groups, such as the National Employment Law Project, the Center for Law and Social Policy, as well as the National Coalition for Literacy and the Commission on Adult Basic Education, mobilized against H.R. 3630 as the bill unfairly targets adults based on education level. If this were ultimately included in a final extension package, this unfunded mandate would overly burden adult education programs as many maintain waiting lists (source). In fact, it's estimated that in the third quarter of 2011 alone, this legislation would have created a demand larger than the number of adults already on existing waiting lists for services nationwide (source).

#### WIA Reauthorization

On December 7, Members of the NCL Board met with the staff of the Chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, Representative John Kline (R-MN), and learned that two WIA bills were going to be introduced in the House on December 8: one titled, the Streamlining Workforce Development Programs Act (H.R. 3610) was introduced by Representative Foxx (R-NC), Chair of the Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training, and the second was introduced by Rep. Joe Heck (R-NV), titled, the Local Job Opportunities and Business Success (JOBS) Act (H.R. 3611).

Rep. Foxx's bill proposes to consolidate 33 of the 47 workforce programs into four formula funding streams:

- The Workforce Investment Fund – provides job training services to adults, unemployed workers, and youth seeking employment;
- The State Youth Workforce Investment Fund – serves the nation's disadvantaged youth, with a focus on school completion;
- The Veterans Workforce Investment Fund – delivers employment and training services to America's veterans; and
- The Targeted Populations Workforce Investment Fund – continues assistance to special populations, including Native Americans and seasonal farm workers.

According to top House Democrats, the bill would dismantle the national commitment to job training and educational assistance.

Fact Sheet: Streamlining Workforce Development Programs Act (H.R. 3610).

Rep. Joe Heck's bill outlines three component changes to Title One Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs): 1) it requires two-thirds of WIB members to be employers; 2) it removes 20+ specific federally-mandated partners from the boards; and 3) it requires local WIBs to set aside funding for training.

Fact Sheet: Local Job Opportunities and Business Success (JOBS) Act (H.R. 3611).

Earlier this year, Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA), introduced the Workforce Investment Improvement Act (H.R. 2295) to help improve WIA by streamlining operational costs of the one stop career centers, encouraging high quality providers, streamlining access to program services, and other comprehensive reforms to WIA. Chairman Kline's staff requested the Coalition provide feedback on the McKeon bill, in particular. House Democrats plan to introduce their version of WIA reauthorization in the New Year.

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In a recent statement, Rep. Tierney noted, “I believe the Workforce Investment Act must be modernized and strengthened in ways that better align services, increase access to training, support innovation, enable workers to obtain the skills they need to compete for jobs, and ensure employers have the workforce they need to grow and thrive. Ranking Member Miller, Congressman Hinojosa and I will soon introduce WIA reauthorization legislation that reflects these principles and presents a far better and more thoughtful approach than the Republican bill introduced today.” (Source)

The Coalition also came out in support of the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act (AEEGA), which was reintroduced in the House by lead sponsor and Adult Literacy Caucus Co-chair, Rep. Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX). See the NCL Letter of Support, recently sent to House leadership on the Education and the Workforce Committee.

NCL is currently reviewing the Republican-introduced House WIA reauthorization bills and more information and analysis from the Coalition will be forthcoming in the following weeks.

### Pathways Back to Work Act

In October 2011, adult literacy advocates asked Senators to include the Pathways Back to Work Fund in any jobs legislation that was introduced in the Senate. We are happy to report—you succeeded!

On November 15, 2011, Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) introduced S. 1861, the Pathways Back to Work Act of 2011, modeled on provisions of President Obama’s American Jobs Act. This legislation asks Congress to consider the needs of those hard hit by the jobs crisis, the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged adults.

According to Neil Ridley, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), among the bill’s provisions, the fund also establishes a \$1.5 billion competitive grant program for a range of promising research-based work and education opportunities that help low-skilled adults and youth get education and training leading to jobs and credentials. Adult basic education and integrated education and training models are included as options for use of these funds.

In addition, a companion piece of legislation, H.R. 3425, was introduced in the House by Representatives by George Miller (D-CA), Ranking Member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. We need more cosponsors for these bills. Please ask your Senators to co-sponsor S. 1861 today and your Representative to co-sponsor H.R. 3425.

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#### Adult Literacy Advocacy—What this means for you

Actions you can take now include:

- While Members of Congress are home over the holidays, schedule a meeting to introduce yourself to your elected officials and bring them up to speed on the status of adult education programs in the district/state. (Meeting Resources).
- Ask your Senators to co-sponsor S. 1861, the Pathways Back to Work Act and your Representative to co-sponsor H.R. 3425.
- If your House Member is not a part of the House Adult Literacy Caucus, invite—or follow up on past invitations—for your Representative to join the Caucus.
- Plan time in January to potentially garner a strong local grassroots response to WIA reauthorization, in light of recent conversations on the Hill about consolidating programs and the pending release of a Democrat version of WIA in the House.
- Stay tuned in January to give the Coalition your input on what's needed to strengthen an adult literacy movement in our country and commit to what you will do as a part of it.

While it appears that once again the Congress may not get their work done before leaving for the holidays, recent polls show that the ongoing bickering and partisanship is taking a toll on the American public. Congress' approval rating is currently hovering at 9 percent—an all-time low. In fact, a poll released last week found a large majority of voters want to see all Congressional incumbents turned out of office in the next election. Numbers like that should get their attention. Hopefully the spirit of the holidays will linger and 2012 will be a more peaceful and productive year. Cross your fingers and have a great holiday.

Jackie Taylor

National Coalition for Literacy

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