



Summer 2007

The ASTD Policy Brief is a quarterly report on Congressional activity and other public policy news that impacts the workplace learning and performance (WLP) profession.

Legislative Update

Congress has adjourned for their traditional August recess, which provides an excellent opportunity to review the status of legislation affecting the workplace learning and performance (WLP) profession.

America COMPETES Act

On August 2nd, Congress passed the America COMPETES Act (H.R.2272), a massive new bill designed to increase investment in research and education in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

The legislation would require the President to establish a Council on Innovation and Competitiveness, which would be responsible for developing a comprehensive agenda to enhance U.S. competitiveness. In addition, the bill reauthorizes the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Standards and Technology through 2010, and provides significant investments in research and education programs throughout the federal government.

Workforce Investment Act

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 is a \$4 billion job training and employment system administered by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The WIA system provides unemployed, disadvantaged, and incumbent workers access to training grants, labor market information, and job counseling through a nationwide network of One-Stop Career Centers.

Congress has made little progress towards reauthorization of WIA in the current session. The House Education and Labor subcommittee responsible for the law has held two hearings on recommendations for improving the law, but legislation has not been introduced. The Senate has not acted on WIA so far, and it is unclear when a bill might be introduced.

Higher Education Act

The Senate unanimously passed reauthorizing legislation (S.1642) for the Higher Education Act (HEA) on July 24th, providing a five-year extension of the law governing financial assistance for students and institutions of higher learning. The House has not yet introduced a higher education bill, although House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA) has indicated that HEA reauthorization is still a priority. ASTD submitted recommendations to both the House and the Senate calling for enhanced access to financial assistance for non-traditional students.

Appropriations Update

The House has passed their Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 appropriations bill (H.R. 3043) to provide funding for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Funding for WIA programs remains steady at FY 2007 levels, although the bill did include an amendment calling for a \$335 million rescission of previously allocated but unexpended funds. This amendment has proven controversial, as many states dispute the Department of Labor's process for identifying unexpended funds. The Senate appropriation bill (S.1710) has been approved by committee but has not received floor consideration as yet, and does not contain the rescission. Even if the two chambers can reconcile their respective bills, the administration has threatened to veto a final bill if it exceeds the amount requested in the President's February budget proposal.

Trade Adjustment Assistance

Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) recently introduced a bill to reauthorize the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program, the federal program that provides job training and wage support for workers displaced by foreign trade. While the Baucus/Snowe bill is not the first bill to be introduced, it is noteworthy in that it extends benefits under the program to service workers; currently, the program is designed primarily to benefit workers involved in manufacturing.

The future of any TAA legislation is unclear. Traditionally, TAA legislation has been connected with the President's trade promotion authority (TPA), which Congress allowed to expire earlier this summer. If Congress opts not to reauthorize TPA, it seems likely that the administration will resist efforts to modify or extend trade adjustment assistance.

Section 127 Legislation

Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) introduced a bill to permanently extend section 127 of the Internal Revenue Code, under which employers may establish a tax-preferred educational assistance program for employees. The provision is set to expire in 2010. Under current law, employers may provide employees up to \$5,250 per year for tuition, fees, books, supplies, and equipment. Payments received under such a plan are excluded from the employee's gross income for tax purposes. ASTD has partnered with the Society

for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and other like-minded organizations to form a coalition in support of this legislation.

ASTD 2007 International Conference & Exposition

ASTD's 2007 International Conference & Exposition in Atlanta, GA featured four new sessions focusing on public policy issues and resources for the workplace learning and performance profession.

"Bridging the Skills Gap," a panel discussion on ASTD's recent whitepaper of the same name, presented several angles of the skills gap issue, including workforce development best practices, skills research and assessment, and public policy implications. The event was moderated by Vince Serritella, Vice President, Employee Development for W.W. Grainger, Inc. and immediate past chair of ASTD's Public Policy Council, and featured presentations by representatives of the Social Security Administration, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), and ACT, Inc.

C. Michael Ferraro, President and CEO of Training Solutions, Inc. and current member of the Public Policy Council, presented a session on "How to Access and Influence Public Sector Training Dollars." The session educated participants on how to take advantage of federal, state, and local government training resources.

Representatives from the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration provided two sessions in partnership with ASTD, including an overview of the public workforce system and an exciting look at industry-driven tools for workforce development.

Workforce Innovations 2007

For the third year, ASTD worked with the Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration to co-sponsor the Workforce Innovations conference, which took place July 17-19, 2007 in Kansas City, MO. Workforce Innovations is an annual conference bringing together more than 3,000 local, state, and national workforce leaders from industry, education, and economic development to share ideas and discuss the critical talent development challenges facing the U.S. ASTD Policy & Public Leadership presented a session highlighting the action plan in the "Bridging the Skills Gap" whitepaper. Designed for business leaders and practitioners to help close gaps, the discussion and action plan helped identify ways that individuals, organizations, and governments can close the skills gaps affecting the U.S. workforce.

New Tools for Training Assistance

ASTD Press released a new *Infoline* entitled "Use Public Tools for Career Success" in June 2007. Developed by ASTD Policy & Public Leadership, the publication provides a practical guide to accessing federal and state grants, taking advantage of training tax credits, and utilizing the public workforce system under WIA.

ASTD Policy & Public Leadership has also posted a new tool on its website: a federal training assistance guide. The guide provides information on over 200 federal grants and other assistance programs that can be used for workforce training and development. To view the Infoline and the federal training assistance guide, please visit:

<http://www.astd.org/ASTD/publicPolicy/PublicSectorResourcesforWLPProfessionals.htm>

Rep. Moran Acknowledges ASTD, Employee Learning Week

In remarks published July 16th in the *Congressional Record*, Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA) recognized ASTD and its members for their continuing efforts towards developing a skilled workforce. The text of his remarks is as follows:

Madam Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the American Society for Training & Development, ASTD, as one of the largest associations dedicated to workplace learning and performance professionals, and recognize their annual Employee Learning Week, that is to be held December 3rd through the 7th, 2007.

* In 1944, ASTD began their first annual conference. ASTD has widened the profession's focus to connect learning and performance to individual and organizational results, and is considered a strong voice in the field of workplace development.

* Members of ASTD come from more than 100 countries and connect locally in 136 U.S. chapters and 25 global networks. Members work in thousands of organizations of all sizes, in government, as independent consultants, and suppliers.

* ASTD has a commitment to maintaining an edge in the highly skilled workforce that is critical to growing and sustaining a competitive advantage. To further these goals, ASTD has declared December 3rd through the 7th, 2007, as "Employee Learning Week" and designated time for organizations to recognize the strategic value of employee learning.

* I applaud ASTD and its members for their commitment to developing the skills of employees and the workforce during Employee Learning Week, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting policies that commit to maintaining a highly skilled workforce.