



// ON THE HILL //

THE POLITICS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Members of Congress sponsor bills that promote social causes.

By Kermit Kaleba

IT'S NOT EASY BEING SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR MOST WORKERS. Although many doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals enter their fields with a desire to give back to society, they cannot always endure the long hours and low pay often associated with helping disadvantaged individuals. As a result, some members of the United States Congress have introduced bills to attract and keep valuable professionals in public service.

Not surprisingly, one industry targeted as particularly in need is health-care. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that nearly 50 million Americans do not have access to medical care. However, a bill offered by Representative John Conyers (D-Mich.) may change that. The proposal would reauthorize the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program, a federal initiative that currently places about 4,000

Inside **Intelligence**:

New training laws in California	12
How friends affect productivity / Tips on asking for help	15
IBM's unique new learning portfolio	16
Why management can't connect / Convergys to perk up revenue with Starbucks deal	17

primary care clinicians in medically underserved communities across the country. The legislation also would provide competitive grants to support residency training at community health centers that emphasize primary care. An identical bill has been introduced by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Ark.) who also proposed a \$1,000 tax credit for each month that a physician provides primary healthcare services in “frontier” or lightly populated areas.

Murkowski, however, isn't the only senator who recognizes that recruiting and training healthcare workers is a challenge in rural areas. Senator Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) introduced the Rural Nursing Promotion Act, which would create a pilot distance education program for nursing. Senator Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) initiated a similar act that supports training for healthcare practitioners in rural areas. He also introduced separate legislation to establish a training grant program for social workers and offer scholarships to students interested in pursuing social work studies.

Education is another area of concern, especially as the No Child Left Behind Act continues to set new expectations for teachers in an already challenging profession. For example, under the 2002 law all teachers must become “highly qualified.” To help teachers meet this standard, Senator Jack Reed (D-R.I.) introduced a bill that would create a grant program to improve teaching skills for new teachers and early education providers and provide professional development opportunities for more experienced educational professionals. Under the Math and Science Incentive Act, presented by Representative Frank Wolf (R-Va.), individuals who commit to teaching science, technology, engineering, or math at an elementary or secondary school for five years would be eligible for student loan forgiveness. Similarly, Representative Jose Serrano (D-N.Y.), sponsored a lower house bill to fund the recruitment, hiring, and training of 100,000 paraprofessionals who help teachers manage their classrooms.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Established in 1970, the EPA is responsible for enforcing environmental laws and regulations in the United States. In addition, the agency provides or supports classroom and online training programs in topics such as watershed management and pesticide safety. Here are a few of the various programs:



- The Environmental Education and Training Partnership offers teachers and other educational professionals professional development and learning opportunities in subjects such as environment, natural resources, and ecology.
- The Superfund Job Training Initiative provides support to communities affected by hazardous waste sites by training participants to assist in cleanup efforts.
- The Air Pollution Institute provides a wide range of technical training for state, local, and other air pollution professionals.

MORE/ <http://epa.gov>

Representative Carolyn McCarthy (D-N.Y.) found a way to address shortages in both the healthcare and education fields. Her proposed Teacher and Nurse Support Act would provide loan forgiveness programs for qualifying teachers and nurses.

Public defenders play a key role in the U.S. legal system, often representing clients without the means to pay for services. But with the cost of legal education rising—the American Bar Association estimates total costs at private law schools exceeded \$90,000 in 2006—many young lawyers feel they must pursue higher paying private sector positions. An amendment to the Senate's Higher Education Act reauthorization bill offered by Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) would provide loan assistance for public prosecutors and defenders.

While many bills encourage individuals to pursue public service careers, other legislation is aimed at promoting environmentally conscious jobs. Representative Hilda Solis (D-Calif.) recently

introduced the Green Jobs Act, which would establish an energy efficiency and renewable energy worker training program. According to Solis, “This legislation is an opportunity to advance not only the energy security of our nation, but also the economic security of our families. Through targeted job training efforts, we can support both our nation's innovation and technological leadership and lift people out of poverty.” The House Education and Labor Committee passed the legislation in June, clearing it for consideration by the full House of Representatives. Similar language was included in the energy bill passed by the Senate earlier this term.

It is unclear if Congress will ultimately pass laws supporting socially responsible employment, but workplace learning professionals engaged in those fields should keep a close eye on Washington in the coming months.

Kermit Kaleba is a policy specialist for ASTD; kkaleba@astd.org.