

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE  
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Workforce Committee Leaders Introduce Legislation to Strengthen & Improve America's Job Training System

Washington, D.C. - House Education & the Workforce Committee leaders, led by 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee Chairman Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-CA) and Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH), today introduced the Job Training Improvement Act, legislation that would strengthen and improve America's job training system to help states and communities ensure workers get the training they need to find good jobs. Through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) system, job seekers have access to job training, job counseling, and labor market information to help them get back on their feet. The proposal is similar to a bill passed by the House in 2003.

"Improving the nation's job training programs is critical to our ongoing effort to equip Americans with the resources and skills they need to find a new job and be successful in today's changing economy," said McKeon. "This bill will provide job-seekers with the tools and flexibility they need, while reducing unnecessary duplication and inefficiency, to ensure that job training programs are responsive and effective in helping Americans find a new job and make a quick return to work."

"I look forward to moving the bill through the House early in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress and am committed to ensuring we enact job training reforms in this Congress," McKeon added.

"Strengthening job training programs and reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act is a top priority for our Committee this year," Boehner said. "Despite the roadblocks set up by Senate Democrat leaders last year to block job training reforms from being enacted, Republicans will continue to focus on the needs of job-seeking Americans and move forward with reforms to strengthen our job training programs."

In the 108th Congress, a conference on job training reform was stalled by Senate Democrats who refused to allow House-Senate negotiations to move forward. The House passed its version of the job training reform bill on May 8, 2003, and the Senate passed its bill on November 14, 2003. The House moved to go to conference and appointed conferees on June 3, 2004. On July 14, 2004, Boehner and McKeon sent a letter to then-Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) urging him to allow the Senate to appoint conferees, but Sen. Daschle did not respond to the request. Moreover, on September 22, 2004, Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) moved to appoint conferees but was blocked by Senate Minority Whip Harry Reid (D-NV) - the latest in a long series of obstacles thrown in the path of the job training reauthorization process by Senate

Democratic leaders. As a result, job training reform was not enacted in the 108th Congress.

The Job Training Improvement Act would build upon the significant reforms made in the bipartisan Workforce Investment Act (WIA) that was enacted in 1998. While those reforms have helped provide workers with the resources and tools necessary to rejoin the workforce or retrain for better jobs, areas of inefficiency and duplication remain. Duplication of services under the current WIA system reduces the amount of money that could be used to efficiently provide employment and training services to individuals seeking jobs. Overlap in training programs under the current WIA law has contributed to the growth of a confusing patchwork at the state and local level. Governors and state and local officials need the flexibility to target these resources toward the unique needs of their communities.

The legislation introduced today would help improve job training opportunities for Americans striving to get back to work by streamlining unnecessary bureaucracy, increasing cooperation among workforce development partners, protecting the rights of faith-based service providers participating or seeking to participate in the job training system, and authorizing personal reemployment accounts of up to \$3,000 to help unemployed Americans purchase job training and other key services. While the introduced bill does not include President Bush's proposal to expand the role of community colleges in job training efforts, Republicans plan to incorporate it into the bill at some point during the legislative process.

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(A bill summary is included below)

#### Job Training Improvement Act Summary

Highlights of the Job Training Improvement Act include:

**Eliminating duplication and waste:** The bill creates a consolidated funding stream to streamline program administration and create more program efficiency at the state and local level. Funds continue to be targeted for those most in need of critical reemployment services. Priority is given to unemployed and low-income individuals in the adult grant program.

**Employment services to help job seekers get back to work:** Under the bill, employment services continue to be provided as core services in the one stop career centers. To be clear that such services will continue, the bill incorporates current employment service functions into the description of core services. For example, the bill requires one stop centers to provide labor exchange services, including job search and placement assistance, as well as appropriate recruitment services for employers.

**Ensuring the one-stop delivery system is demand-driven:** The bill requires state and local workforce investment boards to ensure that the system is dynamic and reflective of the workforce needs in the local area, and would increase connections to economic development. The measure also allows training for incumbent workers so employers may upgrade the skills of current workers, and would encourage the highest caliber training providers, including

community colleges, to offer training through the one-stop system.

Removing barriers to job training: The bill eliminates arbitrary provisions of current law that prevent someone from accessing training immediately if appropriate to meet his or her employment goals. State and local areas would have the flexibility to tailor services to meet individuals' needs.

Allowing faith-based groups to help train and re-train workers: The bill protects the rights of faith-based organizations participating or seeking to participate in the nation's job-training system. Democrat leaders believe faith-based groups should be forced to abandon their religious identities as a condition of participating in the WIA system, arguing such groups should not be allowed to take religion into account when hiring staff. But the Civil Rights Act of 1964 gives faith-based groups the right to hire workers on a religious basis, and President Bill Clinton himself signed a number of major laws upholding this right.

Offering worker reemployment accounts: The bill includes a proposal passed by the House last year and introduced by Rep. Jon Porter (R-NV) to create personal reemployment accounts of up to \$3,000 to help unemployed Americans purchase job training and other key services, such as child care, transportation services, and housing assistance as they strive to return to work. The proposal provides a new, innovative approach designed to provide unemployed Americans additional flexibility, greater choice, and more control over their employment search. Porter will also introduce the proposal as a stand-alone bill.

Improving Adult Education: The bill improves adult education by increasing focus on delivery of the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and math; ensuring that instructional practices are based on scientific research; and increasing accountability for states and local providers to have measurably improved results in basic skills, GED graduates, and those entering higher education.

Enhancing Vocational Rehabilitation: The bill includes a number of provisions designed to strengthen the 1973 Rehabilitation Act in a continuing effort to help individuals with disabilities become employable and achieve full integration into society.

Strengthening partnerships between businesses and job training service providers: In his FY 2005 budget request, President Bush proposed a \$250 million initiative to strengthen the role of community colleges and other institutions that provide job training services to Americans striving to get back to work. While this proposal is not included in the Job Training Improvement Act introduced today, Republicans believe enhanced partnerships between local businesses and job training service providers like community colleges is critical and plan to incorporate the President's proposal into the bill at some point during the legislative process.