

Introduction

The *Federal Legislative Update*, published several times a year by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council), informs stakeholders about developments in federal legislation that impacts workforce policy. This update, the second of 2013, focuses on recent activity in Congress.

Each United States Congress is two years in length and is made up of two sessions. The first session convenes on January 3 of odd-numbered years and subsequently adjourns on January 3 of the following year. The second session convenes from January 3 of even-numbered years, and continues to the following January 3. The 112th Congress recently completed its session and the 113th session members were sworn in and the session began on January 3, 2013.

The current Congress is led by Senate President Joe Biden, Senate President Pro Tempore Patrick Leahy, and House Speaker John Boehner. There are 100 senators, 435 house representatives, and six non-voting members.

Appropriations

During March, Congress passed and the President signed another continuing resolution (CR), House bill (HR) 933, which will fund the government through September 2013, thus avoiding a government shutdown on March 27 when the previous CR expired. The bill provides funding for the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Homeland Security, Justice, and Veterans Affairs for a full year. Domestic programs will generally receive funding at last year's levels, subject to the automatic spending reductions required under the budget sequestration process.

WIA Reauthorization

On March 15, the House of Representatives passed the *Supporting Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills (SKILLS) Act* (HR 803). This bill consolidates 35 federal job-training programs into one Workforce Investment Fund, and requires a two-thirds majority of business representatives on state workforce boards. The *SKILLS Act* also maintains the provision allowing governors to retain reserve funds (15 percent of funds allotted for statewide employment and training activities), as well as gives governors more authority over workforce area designation. This legislation is similar to the *Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012* that was passed by the House Education and the Workforce Committee during the 112th Congress.

Other Workforce-Related Legislation

Senate bill 6, *Putting Our Veterans Back to Work Act*, was introduced and referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on January 22. The bill extends the *VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011* through 2016, and allows certain disabled veterans to extend their time in the program. The act also creates a unified federal web-based employment portal for veterans to access

information on federal programs and activities concerning employment, unemployment benefits, and training. This bill also authorizes grants to employ veterans as firefighters and police officers and extends employment protections provided by the *Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act*.

The *Preserving the Welfare Work Requirement and TANF Extension Act of 2013* (HR 890), was passed by the House on March 13 and awaits a committee hearing in the Senate. This bill would prohibit the secretary of the U.S. Health and Human Services Department from issuing waivers for recipient work requirements. The bill would also extend the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program at baseline levels through December 31, 2013.

Presidential Appointments

On March 19, the president nominated Thomas Perez to replace Hilda Solis as secretary of the Department of Labor. Mr. Perez currently serves as the director of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and is now participating in Senate confirmation hearings.