

Introduction

The Texas Workforce Investment Council's *Federal Legislative Update* is published on a quarterly basis, and informs stakeholders about developments in federal legislation that impacts workforce policy for Texas. This update, the first of 2015, 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 113th Session of Congress began on January 3, 2013, and ended on January 3, 2015.

On November 20, 2014, the 113th Congress passed House Joint Resolution 129, setting the convening date for the 114th Congress as January 6, 2015. The joint resolution was signed into law by President Obama on December 4, 2014.



U.S. House of Representatives

Membership & Leadership

The House of Representatives has 435 voting members and six non-voting members, currently consisting of 188 democrats, 246 republicans, and one vacancy. During the 2014 mid-term elections, 52 new representatives were elected.

The Senate has 100 senators, currently consisting of 44 democrats, 54 republicans, and two independents. During the 2014 mid-term elections, 12 new senators were elected.

The 114th Congress includes the following leadership:

Senate

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|---|-----------------|
| Senate President | Joe Biden |
| Senate President pro tempore | Orrin Hatch |
| Majority (Republican) Leader | Mitch McConnell |
| Assistant Majority Leader (Majority Whip) | John Cornyn |
| Minority (Democratic) Leader | Harry Reid |
| Assistant Minority Leader (Minority Whip) | Dick Durbin |

House of Representatives

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| House Speaker | John Boehner |
| Majority (Republican) Leader | Kevin McCarthy |
| Majority Whip | Steve Scalise |
| Minority (Democratic) Leader | Nancy Pelosi |
| Minority Whip | Steny Hoyer |

Committees & Chairs

Representative John Kline (R-MN) was selected in November to serve as the chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee for the 114th Congress. Robert Schott (D-VA) is the ranking member.

Lamar Alexander (R-TN) will serve as the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) is the new ranking member.

Legislative Process

The first step in the legislative process is the drafting of a bill and its introduction to the Congress. The bill can be written by anyone, but only a member of Congress can introduce the piece of legislation.

The bill is then referred to committee for review. Each committee manages a particular policy area and subcommittees take on more specialized policy areas. The number of committees change with each new Congress as required.

The consideration of a bill begins in a subcommittee where it may be amended, accepted, or rejected. Once the subcommittee agrees to move the bill forward, the bill moves to the full committee where the process is repeated. During the course of this process, hearings may occur to investigate the facts and flaws of the bill.

Once the full committee accepts the bill, it goes to the floor of the House or Senate where it is debated and amendments are proposed and submitted. The bill is passed by a majority of votes and then passed to the other chamber of Congress for approval. The bill must pass both chambers before it can be sent to the president.

The president can either sign or veto the bill. If the president vetoes the bill, he may send it back to Congress for additional amendments. However, Congress may override the veto with a two-thirds vote from each chamber, at which point the bill becomes law.

Federal Budget

On December 11, 2014, the Senate voted 56-40 and passed the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015, also known as the Continuing Resolution Omnibus (cromnibus) bill. The president signed the bill on December 16, 2014. This bill will fund the majority of the government and its programs through the end of fiscal year (FY) 2015, avoiding a government shutdown. The legislation includes appropriations for key workforce programs.

The cromnibus bill restored a portion of the *ability-to-benefit* provision of the Higher Education Act. This provision gives students lacking a high school diploma or its equivalent the ability to access federal aid if they are enrolled in an eligible career pathway program and can demonstrate college readiness. Other education and training programs received funding increases authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to provide job training skills for low-skilled adults, dislocated workers, and low-income youth with barriers to employment.

Training

- WIOA Adult: \$776,736,000 (\$10.7 million above FY 2014)
- WIOA Youth: \$820,430,000 (\$11.4 million above FY 2014)
- WIOA Dislocated Worker: \$1,015,530,000 (\$13.9 million above FY 2014)
- WIOA Governor's Reserve (set-aside): 10 percent (up from 8.75 percent in FY 2014)

The U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations document, *Summary: Fiscal Year 2015 Omnibus Appropriations Bill (2015)*, indicates fiscal year 2015 funding will increase by an estimated \$138 million—when combined with fiscal year 2014 funding—an overall increase for the Governor's Reserve of \$156.518 million for state grant funding.

Education

- Career and Technical Education: \$1,117,598,000
- Adult Education State Grants: \$568,955,000 (\$5 million above FY 2014)
- Pell grants: \$22.475 billion (maximum award estimated to increase by \$100 to \$5,830)
- Carl D. Perkins Grant: \$1.118 billion for the basic state grant and \$7.4 million for the national program

Trade Adjustment Assistance

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 extends authorization for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) by appropriating funds in the amount of \$710.6 million. This act includes the provision of benefits to workers who were certified after December 31, 2014.

Apprenticeship

\$34,000,000 (up \$4 million) to expand registered apprenticeship training.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

On January 5, 2015, the Department of Labor announced that the established time frame for the release of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) draft regulations, initially set for January 18, 2015, has now been extended to spring 2015.

Apprenticeship

The Department of Labor announced the availability of \$100 million in grant funds for the expansion and development of registered apprenticeship programs through the American Apprenticeship Initiative.

The grant will help support activities in the development of registered apprenticeship programs in high-demand occupations for which employers are using H-1B visas to hire foreign workers, such as healthcare, biotechnology, information technology, and advanced manufacturing.

The American Apprenticeship Initiative will fund approximately 25 grants for public-private partnerships; grants will range from \$2.5–5 million.

Other Workforce-Related Legislation

The Texas Workforce Investment Council staff monitors federal workforce-related legislation. The following bills from last session did not pass; however, these areas of interest will continue to be monitored throughout the 114th Legislative Session.

HR 4541 – Skills Gap Strategy Act mandates the development of a strategy report to address the skills gap. The report will analyze issues and offer recommendations to increase on-the-job training and apprenticeship opportunities by identifying industry-recognized postsecondary credentials that are portable nationally and aligned with in-demand occupations.

SB 2788 – Middle School STEP Act would provide support for the development of middle school career exploration programs linked to career and technical education programs of study.

SB 1370 – The Promoting Innovations to 21st Century Careers Act would award planning and implementation grants to state partnerships to create and enhance educational and career pathways for high school students. These pathways are designed to improve transitions to postsecondary schools and registered apprenticeship programs.

HR 4782 – Building Understanding, Investment, Learning, and Direction Career and Technical Education Act would award competitive two-year grants to local educational agencies. Grants would support career and technical education exploration programs to provide middle and high school students with experiential learning opportunities connected to their education and career pathways.

SB 2964 – Amends the Trade Adjustment Assistance Extension Act of 2011 and repeals the program requirements in effect as of February 13, 2011. It also applies to any certifications filed before January 1, 2014, for TAA workers, firms, and farmers under the Trade Act of 1974.

Of Note

President Obama announced a major proposal aimed at increasing access to community colleges. America's College Promise makes two years of community college free for nearly nine million qualifying students. Under this initiative, students must attend college part-time, make satisfactory progress toward completing the program, and maintain a 2.5 GPA to be eligible for the free community college tuition. Participating community colleges must offer programs that lead to degrees and certificates for in-demand occupations or academic programs that fully transfer credits to four-year colleges and universities.