ECONOMY: PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS JOBS BILL AFTER SENATE PASSAGE

By a vote of 68-29, the Senate passed a $17.6 billion jobs bill, HR 2847, on March 17, 2010, and the President signed it on March 18th. The bill provides payroll tax exemptions to small businesses for hiring new, formerly unemployed, workers. It also includes a $1,000 tax credit for small businesses that keep those new workers on their payrolls for at least a year. The bill also broadens expensing provisions for small businesses, extends the Build America Bonds program, and includes an extension of the Highway Trust Fund. California is expected to receive about $278 million of the $932 million transportation funding made available under the bill.

The Senate originally passed the bill, 70-28, on Feb. 24, waiving the Pay-Go rules. But when the House passed the bill on March 4, 2010, by a vote of 217-201, it made changes to comply with Pay-Go and offset the cost of the bill, necessitating the second Senate vote.

EDUCATION: SUBCOMMITTEE AIMS TO BROADEN PARTICIPATION IN STEM

On March 16, 2010, the Research and Science Education Subcommittee (Chairman Lipinski, Ill.) of House Science and Technology Committee held a hearing to examine institutional and cultural barriers in order to broaden the participation of students pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Specifically, Subcommittee Members discussed current efforts to overcome these barriers at both mainstream and minority-serving institutions and the role federal agencies can play in supporting these efforts. Also, in preparation for the America COMPETES Act reauthorization, Subcommittee Members reviewed the state of programs within the National Science Foundation (NSF) with the goal of strengthening the agency’s research and education missions, including programs related to broadening participation in STEM.

Witnesses included: Shirley Malcolm, Head, Directorate for Education and Human Resources Programs, American Association for the Advancement of Science; Alicia Dowd, Associate Professor of
Higher Education, University of Southern California, and Co-director, Center for Urban Education; Keivan Stassun, Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy, Vanderbilt University, and Co-director, Fisk-Vanderbilt Masters-to-PhD Bridge Program; David Yarlott, President, Little Big Horn College, and Chairman, Board of Directors, American Indian Higher Education Consortium; and Elaine Craft, Director, South Carolina Advanced Technological Education National Resources Center, Florence Darlington Technical College.

According to the National Science Board’s Science and Engineering Indicators 2010 report, 486,000 students earned STEM bachelor’s degrees in 2007. Although the number of minorities receiving bachelor’s degrees in STEM fields has increased slightly, the proportion of these degrees (17 percent) is still 20 percentage points less than the representation of minorities within the U.S. college age population (37 percent). Between 2006 and 2016, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics projects that STEM occupations will grow by 21.4 percent. As the fraction of minority college students is expected to grow, so do the concerns regarding the widening gap between the supply and demand of the STEM workforce.

Witnesses cited school debt, lack of minority representation among faculty, a lack of connection between real world problems and solutions to the coursework being taught, and a lack of pre-requisite knowledge in science and mathematics as the current challenges for minority students in pursuit of STEM degrees.

Witnesses stressed the importance of scholarships and fellowship, especially those funded by NSF, in helping minority students offset the cost of STEM degrees. Industry sponsored student internships were stressed as beneficial to students’ experience and financial obligations, allowing them to be full-time students. In order to increase the number of minority STEM faculty, witnesses stressed the significance mentors and role models play in directing minority students to the resources and social networks needed to be successful. Lastly, Subcommittee Members and witnesses discussed the importance of incorporating more science, technology, and engineering coursework earlier on and teaching STEM subjects in an inspirational way which shows students the real world applications of STEM fields.

“Through NSF funding, we have made valuable investments in the development of student services and academic support programs to help students navigate the complexities of college and the STEM curriculum,” said Alicia Dowd, Associate Professor of Higher Education, University of Southern California, and Co-director, Center for Urban Education. “However, a broader strategy is required to reduce the negative campus climates experienced by Hispanic students and other racial-ethnic minorities. This is because stereotypes of underrepresented students—representing them as unable to succeed or disinterested in STEM—are pervasive in society, schools, and postsecondary education.”

NSF is responsible for promoting scientific and engineering literacy in the U.S. and has incorporated goals related to broadening participation in STEM into its strategic plan. NSF requested $788 million in the FY 2011 budget request for programs and activities with either a specific focus or an emphasis on broadening the participation of underrepresented groups in STEM education and research. Although NSF is the main agency involved in broadening participation in STEM, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Energy also support a few programs designed to increase the number of minority representation in STEM fields.
HOUSING: WITNESSES DISCUSS HOPE VI AND PROPOSED CHOICE

On March 17, 2010 the House Financial Services Committee (Chairman Frank, Mass.) held a hearing titled “The Administration’s Proposal to Revitalize Severely Distressed Public and Assisted Housing: The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative.” Witnesses included: the Honorable Shaun Donovan, Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Ms. Sheila Crowley, President and CEO, National Low Income Housing Coalition; Ms. Nancy Rockett Eldridge, Executive Director, Cathedral Square Corporation on behalf of the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging; and others.

For the past 17 years, the federal government has used the HOPE VI to partner with local housing authorities and communities to make investments in communities in distress. “The (program was) designed to emphasize mixed-income communities, leveraging financing, and incorporating supportive services. The $6 billion we have invested in HOPE VI has leveraged twice that amount in additional development capital – $12.3 billion. This is a strong return for the taxpayer, but has also ensured the investment of many parties in the success of the program,” said Secretary Donovan. “HOPE VI has also provided flexibility to local agencies to mix rental and homeownership units on the same site or in the surrounding neighborhood. All of these are lessons that we have built into Choice Neighborhoods.”

Witnesses and the Committee discussed the successes and challenges of HOPE VI and the administration’s proposed Choice Neighborhood program, which would expand the HOPE VI’s redevelopment toolkit to allow for the redevelopment of private and federally assisted properties alongside public housing. According to Secretary Donovan, “this means that the disinvested private and assisted housing that frustrated cities and housing authorities and fostered crime and blight can now be included in comprehensive neighborhood revitalization efforts.”

Witnesses highlighted strengths of the Choice Neighborhoods program including the community based focus of the grants, the added focus on assisted housing and that the program serves a broader housing modality and broader range of housing providers, but suggested that the program could be improved by directing funds to projects that are ready and focused, encouraging accountability, and being cautious about cross agency coordination, which Sheila Crowley, President and CEO, National Low Income Housing Coalition, indicated doesn’t currently exist and could make agility and efficiency hard to achieve.

More information can be found at: http://www.house.gov.

EDUCATION: HOUSE, SENATE DISCUSS ESEA REAUTHORIZATION

On March 17, 2010, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (Chairman Harkin, Iowa) and House Education and Labor Committee (Chairman Miller, Calif.) both held hearings on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The witness for both hearings was Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education.

According to Secretary Duncan, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) presents an unprecedented opportunity to reform the nation’s schools so that they are preparing all students for success in college and careers. “The status quo isn’t good enough,” said Duncan, highlighting that 27-percent of America’s young people drop out of high school; in math literacy, US 15-year olds scored 24th out of 29 developed nations; only 40-percent of young people earn a 2 or 4 year degree; and that the US ranks 10th in the world in the rate of college completion.

Chairman Miller applauded the Obama Administration’s reform efforts and proposals. He also stated that states are taking unprecedented steps in the right direction. “In my home state of California, the state legislature removed the firewall that prevented student achievement data from being linked to teacher performance – a move that was a long time coming” said Chairman Miller. “And in order to qualify for the second round of Race to the Top funding, California recently released its list of 187 persistently underperforming schools. But California’s recent actions, and the actions of so many other states, have signaled they are ready to help fix the schools that are chronically failing our students.”
Secretary Duncan discussed the investments that were made in education through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which included efforts to improve teachers and principals; provided information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children’s schools, and to educators to help them improve their students’ learning; implemented college- and career-ready standards and developed improved assessments aligned with those standards; and improved student learning and achievement in America’s lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions.

He also introduced the Administration’s Blueprint for the ESEA Reauthorization, highlighting the three major goals of the reauthorization: to raise standards; to reward excellence and growth; and to increase local control and flexibility while maintaining a focus on equity and closing the achievement gap.

More information can be found at: http://edlabor.house.gov.

**EDUCATION: COMMITTEE, WITNESSES ADDRESS NEEDS OF DIVERSE STUDENTS IN ESEA REAUTHORIZATION**

On March 18, 2010, the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee (Chairman Kildee, Mich.) of House Education and Labor Committee held a hearing titled “Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization: Addressing the Needs of Diverse Students.” Witnesses, who included a panel of educators, advocates and researchers, discussed ways to close the achievement gap for diverse students. These panelists discussed challenges facing low-income and minority students, English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, Native American students and homeless students.

Some of the recommendations included:

- ensuring that the funding formulas for rural and urban school districts be equitable, and based on percentages of poverty, not raw numbers
- supporting the Rural Education Achievement Program
- permitting states to include growth in their accountability systems, and rewarding districts and schools who are making progress. This is an important tool for measuring the success of English Language Learners, the witnesses said
- increasing resources for the Title III program to help states and school districts provide English language instruction programs for English Language Learners and provide more professional development for the teachers working with these learners.

Witness testimony and an archived webcast of the hearing can be found at: http://edlabor.house.gov.

**RESOURCES: WATER ALLOCATIONS FOR DELTA INCREASED**

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation announced yesterday it will increase its 2010 water supply allocations for Central Valley Project contractors. Agricultural contractors south of the Delta stand to receive a 25% supply, up from 5% initially forecast in February. Agricultural contractors north of the Delta will see a 50% supply, up from 5%, and municipal and industrial users both north and south of the Delta will receive 75% of requested supplies, up from 55%.

The supply increases are due to additional precipitation, improved snowpack, and improved storage at Shasta Reservoir, the Bureau said. According to its February 26 assessment, California is having a near-average water year following three years of drought. The Department of the Interior is also working to secure an additional 150,000-200,000 acre-feet of water for growers on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley in 2010.


**RESOURCES: SENATE WATER SUBCOMMITTEE ASSESSES SECURE WATER ACT**

On March 16, 2010, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power held a hearing on the Bureau of Reclamation’s implementation of the SECURE Water Act, and its WaterSMART program which includes the WaterSMART Grant Program, the Basin Study Program and the Title XVI Program.
Witnesses were: The Honorable Michael Connor, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Department of the Interior; Ms. Melinda Kassen, Trout Unlimited; Mr. Dan Keppen, Family Farm Alliance; Mr. John Entsminger, Representing the Colorado River Basin states; and Mr. Tony Pack, Eastern Municipal Water District, California.

Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) provides water and wastewater services to 675,000 persons in Riverside County in Southern California. Mr. Pack supported the goals of the SECURE Water Act to increase participation of the federal government in water resource management, because of its ability to undertake or coordinate interstate and regional water development and energy projects. He also lauded the Act’s provisions encouraging the federal government to participate by providing technical support by funding important basic research to solve water and related energy problems. The SECURE WATER ACT proposes to achieve these goals through nationwide data collection and monitoring, agency collaboration, basin studies, and further climate change evaluation and activities to increase the efficiency of the use of water in the United States.

Reclamation's WaterSMART Initiative includes the Basin Study Program, cost-shared grants for water management improvement projects, and funding of water reuse and recycling projects through the Title XVI, Water Reclamation and Reuse Program and the WaterSMART Clearinghouse. Together, these programs are the principal components of Reclamation's implementation of the SECURE WATER ACT. Mr. Pack testified that EMWD has participated with Reclamation in several different grant programs that addressed the goal of reducing outside water use, a desalter brine reduction study, development of a landscape water use database, and public school water efficiency retrofits, and looks forward to participating in these programs in the future.

On water recycling, Pack stated that his district's program is 50 years old, but in the past 10 years, public acceptance of recycled water has grown. In 2009, EMWD sold 73 percent of the recycled water produced by our wastewater treatment plants. To put that in perspective, he said, the statewide usage number is about 15 percent, and the nation as a whole only averages five percent beneficial reuse. Pack testified that although Reclamation's Title XVI program provides a means of funding water recycling projects, the program was never adequately funded until the recent infusion of ARRA funding. As a result, there is a substantial backlog of projects in the program. In Southern California alone, Pack said, 17 projects have been approved, and if all are completed they are projected to generate 400,000 acre feet of recycled water annually. He urged the Committee to adequately fund the program to eliminate the backlog of authorized projects.

For the testimony of all the witnesses, go to: [http://energy.senate.gov](http://energy.senate.gov).

On a related issue, on March 16, 2010, the Bureau of Reclamation announced the availability of Water and Energy Efficiency Grants funding, the first funding opportunity in 2010 under the WaterSMART program. Reclamation is seeking proposals for projects that seek to conserve and use water more efficiently, increase the use of renewable energy in water management, protect endangered and threatened species, facilitate water markets, and carry out other activities to address climate-related impacts on water or prevent any water-related crisis or conflict. Information on the funding opportunity is available online at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). For more information on the WaterSMART program visit [www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/](http://www.usbr.gov/WaterSMART/).

**BRIEFING: USC BRIEFING ON HOLLYWOOD AND HEALTH CARE**

A briefing on *Global Health in Hollywood: How TV Teaches Viewers About Global Health – and Why Policymakers Should Care* will be held on March 25, 2010. The Norman Lear Center / USC Annenberg Hollywood, Health & Society Entertainment Education for Television, Movies, and New Media is sponsoring the briefing. It will take place from 10:00 – 11:30 A.M. in 1310 Longworth House Office Building.

The briefing will feature Dr. Neal Baer, Executive Producer, Law & Order: SVU (NBC) and Sandra de Castro Buffington, MPH Director, Hollywood, Health & Society.

RSVP to Jean Brodeur at 202-824-5869 or [brodeur@usc.edu](mailto:brodeur@usc.edu).
REPORT: EVALUATION OF E-VERIFY SUGGESTS PRIVACY, CIVIL RIGHTS HAVE INCREASED

In December 2009, Westat released the findings of its evaluation of the E-Verify Program. It conducted the evaluation at the request of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The Basic Pilot Program, now referred to as E-Verify, was originally authorized under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) to electronically verify the work-authorization status of new hires of participating employers. Its authorization has been extended several times since then, and the Program has been expanded in scope and modified considerably, based, in part, on earlier evaluation reports.

The evaluation explores the extent to which E-Verify is successfully meeting its stated goals of: 1) Reducing the employment of unauthorized workers, 2) Protecting privacy and workers' civil liberties, 3) Reducing (or at least not increasing) discrimination, and 4) Preventing an undue burden on employers. The evaluation focuses on the extent to which the Program is operating efficiently; the impact of recent legislative and program changes; and provides the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) with recommendations for future program changes.

Major findings include:
- Employer compliance with program procedures has increased;
- E-Verify reduces discrimination against foreign-born workers in the hiring process;
- Employers are generally satisfied with the program and feel it is non-burdensome;
- The efficiency and timeliness of the system has improved;
- The number of employers who voluntarily participate in the program has increased; and
- Protections for workers' privacy and civil rights have been strengthened.

The Westat evaluation also found that E-Verify has grown rapidly since its inception. The evaluation states that there has been an eightfold increase in the number of queries run from 2005 to 2008. In FY09, 8.5 million queries were run and an average of 1,000 employers enrolled each week.

The full evaluation and recommendations can be found at: http://www.uscis.gov.

REPORT: ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA INDUSTRIES STRUGGLED THROUGH 2009, LACEDC PREDICTS IMPROVEMENT IN 2010

According to a report released in January 2010 by the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, the entertainment and media industries had a rough year in 2009, but analysts suggest that 2010 is looking brighter. The report on the Los Angeles entertainment and media industries found that:
- Los Angeles County had a 45% share of total U.S. entertainment employment in 2008, but entertainment, media and advertising industry employment, combined, dropped by at least 12,000 jobs (-6.0%) in 2009
- DVD spending (sales and rentals) totaled $21.4 billion in 2009, down from the 2004 peak of $24.9 billion
- Viewership for L.A's largest TV stations dropped in 2009 after a strong 2008
- Local radio stations generated more than $1 billion in ad revenue in 2008, but ad sales were down by -12% compared with the prior year
- Newspapers across the nation are bleeding print readers, ad revenues and employees, but the Los Angeles Times is still the fourth largest newspaper by circulation (657,000 daily) in the country behind the Wall Street Journal, USA Today and the New York Times.
- In 2009, domestic box office receipts totaled $10.7 billion, a new record level
LACEDC predicts that the consolidation in the entertainment and media industries will continue through 2010.

The full text is available at: http://www.laedc.org/reports/Entertainment-2010.pdf.