



March 2, 2005
(House)

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY

H.R. 27 - Job Training Improvement Act of 2005

(Rep. McKeon (R) CA and 15 cosponsors)

The Administration supports House passage of H.R. 27, the Job Training Improvement Act of 2005. The legislation would reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), promote economic development, and better equip workers for success in the 21st century economy.

The Administration appreciates the bill's inclusion of key reforms that are essential to improving WIA's effectiveness, such as: (1) consolidating and improving programs for adults; (2) strengthening accountability for results; (3) enhancing the one-stop delivery system; (4) creating more effective State and local workforce investment boards; and (5) limiting administrative costs, which would free resources and allow more workers to be trained. The Administration also appreciates the bill's authorization of the President's Community-Based Job Training Grants and Personal Reemployment Account initiatives and encourages the Congress to authorize full funding for the Community-Based Job Training Grants at the President's requested level.

The Administration looks forward to working with the Congress to incorporate the President's "WIA Plus" reforms in the final bill. These reforms would provide crucial flexibility by consolidating all four major Labor Department State grant programs and allowing Governors to supplement this consolidated grant with their State's resources from a menu of several other Federal training and employment programs. In exchange for more flexibility, the proposal would establish increasingly rigorous performance standards each year, leading to a goal in the tenth year that States place in employment 100 percent of workers trained with grant resources.

The Administration also supports reauthorizing the Federal adult education program, the National Institute for Literacy, and vocational rehabilitation (VR) State grants and related programs. The Administration is pleased that H.R. 27 includes provisions that will improve the quality and accessibility of Federally funded adult basic education and literacy programs, and strengthens the authority of States to hold local providers accountable for achieving results. The Administration is concerned, though, that, without consequences for States that do not meet their agreed-on adult education performance levels, H.R. 27 would not hold States accountable for improving the performance of those programs. In the case of the VR State grants program, the Administration is pleased that the bill eliminates Senate confirmation of the RSA Commissioner and that the bill addresses the need to better serve students with disabilities in transitioning from school to employment. However, better tools are needed to ensure greater accountability for improved results. The Administration looks forward to working with the Congress to improve and strengthen accountability for all of these programs.

In addition, the Administration supports the provisions of the bill that protect the hiring autonomy of religious organizations consistent with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the First Amendment. As a general rule, when a faith-based organization participates in Federal programs, it need not relinquish its right to religious hiring autonomy. Provisions of the current WIA, however, are inconsistent with this longstanding principle. Receipt of Federal funds should not be conditioned on a faith-based organization's giving up a part of its religious identity and mission. The proposed bill would simply preserve the right of faith-based organizations to hire according to their beliefs as they provide Federally funded services under this bill.

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