



COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Dave Obey (D-WI), Chairman

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Contact: Kirstin Brost
202-225-2771

Chairman Obey's Statement: Labor, Health, Education Subcommittee Markup

WASHINGTON – Today Dave Obey (D-WI), Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and Chairman of that committee's subcommittee on Labor, Health and Education, made the following statement at subcommittee markup of the 2009 bill.

“Today, we begin consideration of the Labor, Health and Education appropriations bill. First, I want to thank my Ranking Member, Jim Walsh, for being a dedicated and gracious partner in helping to shepherd this bill through the various minefields we faced last year and may face again this year. This institution will lose an outstanding public servant with his retirement from the Congress this year. I also want to acknowledge the other Subcommittee Members who will be leaving this year – Ralph Regula, John Peterson, Dave Weldon, and Tom Udall – all of whom have made significant contributions to this bill over the years.

“The Labor, Health and Education Subcommittee held 13 hearings this spring to examine the challenges facing the nation over the next ten years, and to assess what investments are needed to address those challenges. Given the funding constraints placed on us by the Administration's short-sighted priorities, the bill presented today represents our best efforts to invest judiciously in those activities that will help prepare the country to meet the challenges ahead.

“Last year, the President issued a budget that did not make the country stronger. It cut deeply into critical health, education, and workforce development programs.

- The President wanted us to cut vocational education by 50 percent;
- He wanted to eliminate all student aid but Work-Study and Pell Grants;
- He wanted to cut education for handicapped kids by \$318 million;
- He wanted to cut mental health and substance abuse services by \$160 million bucks;
- He planned to cut law enforcement grants by a third;
- He wanted to cut the clean water revolving fund by 37 percent;
- He wanted to cut disabled housing assistance by 47 percent;
- He would have cut low-income heating and cooling assistance, a program that I started with Ed Muskie and Silvio Conte, by 18 percent; and
- He would have cut \$1.1 billion from worker training and protection activities.

“In all my years in Congress, I've never had anybody come up to me and say, “Obey, why don't you guys get your act together and cut cancer research?” And yet, that's what has happened over the last

two years. The President and the Congress have cut 1,100 grants from the National Institutes of Health.

“We tried to correct many of those cuts with a bipartisan bill. Fifty-one Republicans voted for the 2008 Labor-HHS bill, and we fell just four votes shy of being able to override the President’s veto.

“This year, it is like groundhog day all over again. Only this time

- the President doesn’t want to cut vocational education by 50 percent; he wants to eliminate it.
- He doesn’t want to cut graduate medical education at children’s hospitals by 63 percent; he wants to eliminate it;
- He wants to cut \$180 billion out of Medicare over the next five years;
- He wants to cut mental health services by 14 percent, and
- the low-income home heating assistance by 22 percent;
- His budget will result in 6,000 medical research scientists who will no longer be able to get their medical research funded;
- Moreover, despite rising unemployment, he wants to cut workforce training and protection programs again, this time by \$1.2 billion.

“This bill again tries to correct the President’s short-sighted cuts. The 2009 bill we consider today contains the priorities of many Members on both sides of the aisle.

“I have no doubt that the next President will lead the country in an effort to make affordable health care available to every American. While we may disagree over how to finance such a system, we need to make the necessary investments in our health system to begin to prepare.

- “The quality of health care delivered to the American people rests fundamentally on the level of knowledge that we have about diseases. That means expanded medical research is crucial. The President’s response is to freeze funding for the **National Institutes of Health**. This bill rejects that freeze. It provides a \$1.2 billion increase over last year and the request, so that NIH can capitalize on unprecedented scientific opportunities to reduce the disease burden on the country. This increase is the largest in six years. More than 1,000 new research grants will be supported.
- “This bill will provide an additional 330,000 people with access to **community health centers** by providing a \$100 million increase over last year (\$73 million over the request). It provides \$75 million for a new **State Health Access Grants** program that will expand State health coverage initiatives for the uninsured. The Committee might be interested to know that this Subcommittee engaged in a similar effort from 2000 to 2005 to provide States with planning grants, which they used to collect data about the characteristics of the uninsured within their State and to develop proposals to offer affordable health insurance coverage. These planning grants were the genesis of some of the comprehensive State programs now being put in place across the country, such as those in Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont. The new grants funded in the bill will move a number of States to the next level of implementation.
- “The bill also provides \$75 million to expand **State high risk insurance pools** to provide affordable health insurance to almost 200,000 people; and \$45 million to help **seniors understand what Medicare benefits are available to them**, \$6 million more than last year.

- “The bill restores \$240 million in cuts made by the Administration to **health professions** and **nursing education** and invests an additional \$69 million over last year to train the doctors, nurses, and other health professionals that the country will need to ensure that more people get the quality health care they need and deserve. Rather than cutting public health priorities, such as **childhood immunizations**, by \$475 million as proposed by the President, this bill provides CDC with a \$156 million increase over last year. Rather than cutting **mental health and substance abuse services** by nearly \$200 million as proposed by the Administration, this bill provides \$80 million more than last year.
- “For the **rural health programs** sought by the Congressional Rural Caucus, which the President proposed to cut by \$118 million or 45 percent, the bill provides a \$31 million increase over last year. These important programs support more than 1,200 small, at-risk rural hospitals, create health care networks for more than 775,000 rural residents in underserved communities, and support rural health research centers and State rural health offices.

"In the area of education, the nation faces immense challenges in raising the academic performance of all students in order to remain competitive in the global economy. A staggering 1.2 million students will fail to graduate from high school this year. Nationally, only 78 percent of 9th graders who are white will make it to graduation four years later. This figure drastically drops to only 58 percent for Hispanics, 55 percent for African Americans, and 51 percent for Native American students. Those results tell us that we are not providing equal educational opportunity because without a high school education, opportunity is very limited. To provide educational opportunity for these students, the bill makes key investments in public education:

- “The bill expands Federal support for early childhood education, which has an enormous payoff to society. It includes \$7.1 billion for **Head Start** services for nearly 900,000 low-income children, which is \$242 million over last year (\$93 million over the request). Instead of freezing **child care assistance** as the President’s budget does, this bill provides a \$50 million increase for a total of \$2.1 billion, supporting high quality child care for an additional 8,700 children.
- “The bill invests \$15.1 billion for **Title I grants for low-income children**, an additional \$665 million over last year (\$259 million over the request). These funds will provide targeted support to more than 11,000 schools that have not met No Child Left Behind academic standards.
- “The bill rejects the President’s attempt to eliminate as many as 1.1 million disadvantaged children from **after-school programs** with a \$281 million cut. Instead, the bill provides a \$50 million increase over last year to \$1.1 billion for after-school centers.
- “Under the President’s budget, the share of special education costs met by the Federal government would drop to 17.1 percent, continuing an unfortunate downward trend. Due to the leadership of Jim Walsh, this bill reverses that trend by increasing the Federal share to 17.5 percent – the highest percentage contribution since 2006. It does so by providing a \$604 million increase over last year (\$267 million over the request) for the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B State Grants**.

"We also hear a lot of talk about equal access to higher education. If you are a student from a family that is in the top 20 percent of earners in the country, college expenses consume about 5 percent of

household income. But, if you are in the bottom 20 percent of earners, college expenses consume a gigantic 70 percent of household income. That is not a level playing field.

- “To help 5.7 million low- and middle-income families pay college costs, this bill invests an additional \$3.1 billion over last year to increase the maximum **Pell Grant** by \$169 over 2008 (\$100 over the request) to \$4,410. With additional mandatory funding under the College Cost Reduction Act, the Congress will have increased the maximum Pell Grant by \$850 since 2006.
- “The President’s budget eliminates **other student aid programs, including Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants**. This bill rejects the President’s eliminations and continues these programs to help make college more affordable.

“Even though the country faces record high and exploding costs of energy, the President’s budget cuts the **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program** by \$570 million, or 22 percent – a cut that would eliminate assistance to 1.2 million people. This bill rejects that cut and provides an additional \$200 million over last year to help approximately 450,000 additional households pay their utility bills compared to last year.

“The President’s budget cuts other programs that help vulnerable individuals and families cope with the rising costs of gasoline, utilities, food, and other basic necessities.

- “The President’s budget slashes \$760 million from the **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)** which provides flexible funding to States for safety net services; this bill rejects that cut and provides \$1.7 billion for SSBG. The President’s budget eliminates the **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)**, which supports safety net services at the community level for 16 million individuals; this bill rejects that termination and, instead, provides a \$46 million increase over last year.
- “**Senior nutrition** programs are boosted by \$50 million over 2008 and the request, resulting in an additional 14 million meals that will be served in 2009.

“It is difficult to fathom the Administration’s indifference to the plight of the unemployed. In the teeth of the largest rise in unemployment in decades, the Administration has been resisting efforts to provide an additional 13 weeks of help to workers who have exhausted unemployment benefits and still cannot find work. In his budget, the President also cuts employment, training and worker safety programs by \$1.2 billion. This bill rejects those cuts and makes strategic investments to help Americans compete in the global economy.

- “Instead of accepting a \$241 million cut for **Dislocated Workers** training requested by the President, the bill provides \$40 million more than last year to help unemployed workers obtain new job skills, including \$22.5 million for a new “green collar jobs” training initiative.
- “Instead of a \$46 million cut to **Job Corps**, which provides at-risk youth with occupational and employment skills, this bill provides a \$107 million increase. Further, the bill provides an \$11 million increase over last year for **YouthBuild** (\$20 million over the request), in order to expand this innovative program that trains youth in the construction trades while they build affordable housing.

- “The bill provides \$172 million more than last year for **State Unemployment Insurance Operations** so that States can process rising unemployment benefit claims; and it rejects the President’s proposed elimination of the **Employment Service** by providing \$703 million to help 13 million people find jobs.

“The bill also accelerates efforts at the **Social Security Administration** to ensure that seniors and the disabled receive the benefits to which they are entitled. It provides \$682 million over last year (\$100 million over the request) to help SSA reduce the backlog of disability hearings, improve claims processing times, and support field offices.

“There are some places in the bill, however, where we do not provide additional investments. The bill does not continue funding for the **Reading First** program, which has been plagued with mismanagement, conflicts of interest, and cronyism as documented by the Department of Education Inspector General. Moreover, a scientifically rigorous study released by Department of Education in May 2008 found that the program has had no discernable impact on student reading performance.

“In summary, I believe that the investments in this bill will address the country’s most pressing needs, and advance the country’s health, well-being, and productivity.”

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