



Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act: **IS THERE HOPE?**

The battle to reinstate the momentous legislation may be ongoing, but it certainly isn't out of the question.

By C. Michael Ferraro

To help members and learning professionals stay current on activity at the U.S. federal level, ASTD tracks and reports on legislation and regulations that affect training and workforce development.

One of the largest pieces of legislation of interest to the field is the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the landmark legislation originally passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton in 1998 to streamline and coordinate workforce training programs at the federal level. Although the bill has been introduced for reauthorization in the House and Senate by the last three Congresses, it has not passed.

While WIA reauthorization has not succeeded in recent years, there is a great deal of momentum behind it this year. ASTD is engaged in discussions

with staff from the committees responsible for this legislation: the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and its Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety; and the House of Representatives' Education and Labor Committee and its subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness.

In December, Representative Brett Guthrie (R-Kentucky), ranking member of the House subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness, introduced a WIA reauthorization bill. And at a recent hearing of the Education and Labor Committee during which Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis testified, reauthorization of the bill was raised several times.

ASTD continues to advocate for WIA reauthorization and suggests that several key points be considered in the legislation: streamline workforce investment boards so they are smaller,

more flexible, and responsive to the needs of employers; ensure that training and workforce development programs are measured by comprehensive performance metrics; and ensure better coordination and collaboration with partners in the system to provide worker preparation and training services. In addition, ASTD will offer insight about e-learning since the original legislation was passed in 1998 as the field was beginning to see tremendous growth in technology-based training.

Updates on WIA reauthorization will be available quarterly in ASTD *Links*. Background on the workforce investment system may be found at www.doleta.gov. Additional information on ASTD's public policy efforts is available at www.astd.org/publicpolicy.

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WHY IS REAUTHORIZATION IMPORTANT?

- Like other bills, the original version of WIA requires appropriation of funding every year to ensure that the bill continues in its original form. The reauthorization process gives Congress the opportunity to make changes and additions or update the legislative language with the ultimate goal of ensuring that the bill carries out its intended work.
- The reauthorization process means that legislators in both parties from the House and Senate, along with the current administration, have the opportunity to bring forth proposals to add to or change the legislation. In recent years, WIA reauthorization has stalled because of political disagreements from both sides.
- WIA reauthorization is critical to ensuring that the framework for the publicly funded workforce system in the United States—currently operating from the original 1998 bill—includes current thinking and best practices in training.