



Pride Of The Ojibwa
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May 4, 2012

The Honorable John Kline
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2031

The Honorable George Miller
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Education and the Workforce
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2031

RE: Comments to Be Included in the Hearing Record Regarding:
The Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

We understand that two competing bills, H.R. 4297, The Workforce Investment Improvement Act of 2012, and H.R. 4227, The Workforce Investment Act of 2012, have been introduced which would amend and reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act and that the Committee on Education and the Workforce held a hearing on these bills on April 17, 2012. We ask that the following comments be included in the record for this hearing.

We are writing out of concern about some of the provisions which have been included in H.R. 4297. The most pressing of our concerns relate to the variable and significantly lower funding levels that H.R. 4297 would lock in for Native workforce training programs through FY 2018.

H.R. 4297 would repeal Section 166 – Native American Programs and Section 169 – Youth Opportunity Grants (which has a 1.5 percent Native Youth set-aside) and replace these two sections with a "not more than one percent" set aside to "make grants to, and enter into contracts or cooperative agreements with Indian tribes, tribal organizations, Alaska-Native entities, Indian controlled organizations serving Indians, or Native Hawaiian organizations to carry out employment and training activities" from the total amount appropriated for states.

Under this "not more than one percent" provision, the Secretary could lawfully zero out program funding to Native entities and would likely provide less than one percent. Even in the best case scenario, where the Secretary allocated the full one percent, Native entities would likely receive less than they are currently receiving.

The existing Native programs are very effective in targeting the particular economic and social circumstances on Indian reservations. Their loss would be tragic. Currently, Lac Courte Oreilles successfully operates both adult and youth workforce training programs. In FY 2012, using only \$104,109 in grant funding we have provided extensive work experience, classroom training and support services (referrals for transportation, clothing, etc.) to many tribal members. The unemployment rate on our reservation is 66% (2005 American Indian Population and Labor Force Report, U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Indian Services). Because of this program we have been able to take a number of unskilled workers and help them gain the skills they need to compete in the job market and become gainfully employed, but there is much more work to be done to fight our high unemployment and poverty rates.

We believe that the very survival of this valuable program on our reservation is at stake in this legislation. We ask that you consult with Tribal governments about how to improve these programs before advancing this legislation further.

Sincerely,



Gordon C. Thayer
Chairman

cc: Wisconsin Congressional Delegation
House Education and Workforce Committee Members