



COALITION ON HUMAN NEEDS

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Appropriations Stalls on the Senate Floor

Senate work on a “minibus” package of three appropriations bills – Agriculture, Commerce-Justice-Science, and Transportation-HUD – stalled shortly after it began. While senators voted overwhelmingly in favor (95-3) of beginning consideration of the package (H.R. 4660) on Tuesday, June 17, Majority Leader Reid (D-NV) effectively pulled the legislation from the floor on Thursday, June 19 when Republicans and Democrats failed to come to an agreement on the process for allowing and voting on amendments. Democrats had said only germane amendments would be allowed, but Republicans balked at Democrats’ initial insistence that amendments reach a 60-vote threshold for adoption. While negotiations continued last week, no agreement

was reached, and the Senate headed into its July 4th recess not having voted on a single appropriations bill.

One amendment to the Senate package that particularly concerned advocates would let schools waive out of several school lunch and snack food requirements. Filed by Senator John Hoeven (R-ND), the amendment goes even further than a similar provision in the House bill by letting schools opt out of these standards if they believe compliance would force them to lose money or that it would be hard to buy products that meet the requirements, without providing any evidence to support their concerns. The Senate bill [already made concessions](#) in the whole grain and sodium requirements, the same area this amendment addresses. In addition, the bill allows for the inclusion of white potatoes in the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) food package, but it also allows the USDA to cut potatoes from the package in the future if a mandatory study deems they shouldn't be included. Both of these provisions would see Congress overriding recommendations from scientists, nutritionists, and health experts, a possibility that has concerned and angered advocates.

Another amendment, filed by Senator David Vitter (R-LA), would prohibit Census Bureau operations unless it includes questions about citizenship and immigration status in the 2020 census. Many advocates cried foul, saying this amendment ran counter to the goals of the U.S. Constitution and was an attempt to discourage participation in the census in order to skew congressional apportionment decisions. There was also concern that some of the harmful amendments added to the House Transportation-HUD bill would be offered in the Senate.

On the House side, floor action on its Agriculture appropriations bill (H.R. 4800) remains stalled in part because of controversy over similar amendments affecting nutrition requirements for schools and WIC. As [reported earlier](#), the House was expected to vote its version of the bill in mid-June. However, work on the legislation was suspended shortly after it was taken up and is not expected to resume until later this summer, giving Republicans more time to shore up support for the controversial provisions. For more information on the Agriculture, Transportation-HUD, and other appropriations bills, see the June 17 [Human Needs Report](#).

It remains to be seen whether the Senate will take up the minibus again or will try to rearrange it in some way. Some believe the inability to reach a compromise on this package of bills, deemed relatively non-polarizing, signals that the attempt to pass bills individually or in small groups is effectively dead in the Senate. Both the House and Senate have now slipped on the initial deadlines they set for the appropriations process. It is unclear whether Congress will be able to get back on track with passing and conferencing individual bills, or some combinations of bills like a minibus or omnibus package, or whether they will opt for a temporary continuing resolution to keep the government funded when the new fiscal year begins this fall.

Some Members Not Giving Up on Unemployment Insurance

The federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) program expired on December 28, 2013. In April, the Senate passed a 5-month retroactive extension with bipartisan support. However, the House refused to bring a bill extending the program to the floor. Had the Senate bill become law, it would have expired on June 1. Since December, 3.1 million workers and their

families, including 300,000 veterans, have lost assistance after their state insurance (26 weeks in most states) ran out. Many of these families have urgent needs – some have lost their homes, had to forgo educational advancement opportunities, and are relying on other government programs or family members for food and other basic necessities.

Two of the strongest Senate proponents of EUC are Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Dean Heller (R-NV), the lead sponsors of the bill that passed in April. They have again teamed up to draft a bill to extend the program for 5 months going forward. Their bill, S. 2532, was introduced on June 25. It would allow job seekers who were cut off on December 28 and are still unemployed to resume receiving EUC for the remaining number of weeks they would have been eligible for had the program not expired. The \$9.7 billion cost of the extension is fully paid for by allowing corporations to reduce tax-deductible pension fund contributions and extending customs fees. Representatives Dan Kildee (D-MI) and Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) have introduced companion legislation, H.R. 4970, in the House.

Some would argue that the fact that the official unemployment rate has dropped to 6.3 percent signals a stronger economy and therefore a lack of a need to extend EUC. However, a [report](#) from the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) shows that, because of the lack of job opportunities, nearly 6 million potential workers are neither working nor actively seeking employment. If those workers were included, the unemployment rate would be 9.7 percent. Further, according to [EPI](#) the share of the workforce that is long-term unemployed is twice as high as it was in any other period when we allowed long-term unemployment benefits to expire.

Advocates were hopeful that chances for House passage of EUC would be enhanced when Representative Eric Cantor (R-VA) was replaced as House Majority Leader, the individual with the most power to determine which bills come to the House floor. The new Majority Leader, Representative Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), comes from Bakersfield, CA where the unemployment rate is 11.4 percent. However, politics seems to be the overriding factor in the House's refusal to extend EUC.

Advocates note the glaring inconsistency in the Republican demand that EUC be fully paid for while tax cuts that benefit corporations are not paid for. The Senate Finance Committee has passed a two-year extension of tax (cut) extenders with an \$85 billion price tag. In addition, the House Ways & Means Committee has passed legislation to make permanent a series of tax extenders that mostly benefit corporations, with an estimated cost of [\\$580 billion](#) according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Neither the Senate nor the House pays for these tax cuts. For additional information, see the June 17 [Human Needs Report](#), and leave your comments on this inconsistency on CHN's blog, [Voices for Human Needs](#).

Senate Passes Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

On Wednesday, in a rare act of bipartisanship, the Senate overwhelmingly passed ([95-3](#)) legislation to update the federal workforce development system. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) would replace the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which was originally passed in 1998 and has been overdue for reauthorization for over a decade. WIOA (H.R. 803) will provide job training and career services to youth and adults to help them prepare

for work or additional education, find and keep jobs, and build the skills necessary for the 21st century. It will provide a wide range of services for low-skill, low-income people and individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment, improving access to high-demand, higher-paying jobs and career pathways out of poverty for many. For more specifics on the bill, see the June 17 [*Human Needs Report*](#).

Two amendments offered by Republican senators addressing local workforce boards and evaluation reports were rejected before the bill was passed. While some advocates had hoped that an extension of unemployment benefits would be added on to the legislation, it was not. The bill will now move to the House, where it also enjoys bipartisan support and is expected to pass relatively quickly. The White House also expressed support for the legislation through a [Statement of Administration Policy](#) issued on Wednesday.