

**STATUS: FY 2008
APPROPRIATIONS**

The latest word is that the Senate FY 2008 Labor- HHS-Education appropriations bill – containing funds for the Title VIII - Nursing Workforce Development Programs – is unlikely to be scheduled for a floor vote in the Senate. The House-Senate conference will likely proceed between the Committee-passed Senate bill and the House-passed bill and will be in the context of either a large omnibus bill, or a smaller mini-bus bill. It also looks like the omnibus process will not finish until sometime before Christmas. Both the House and Senate bills are far better from the NLN's perspective than the Bush Administration's FY 2008 budget request.

**Legislation To Combat
Nurse Shortage Reintroduced**

On June 16, Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Gordon Smith (R-OR) introduced S.1604, the [Nursing Education and Quality of Health Care Act of 2007](#). The legislation, which Clinton previously introduced during the 109th Congress, aims to increase the nurse workforce in rural areas, expand nursing school faculty, and develop initiatives to integrate patient safety practices into nursing education.

The specific provisions of the Act include funding for:

- ▶ grants and programs in rural communities to encourage and enhance the recruitment and retention of nursing students, nurse faculty, and nurses who serve in rural areas;
 - ▶ projects that will increase the number of nurse faculty;
 - ▶ programs that will improve recruitment, scholarships, and educational preparation, and establish online courses and accelerated doctoral programs; and
- ▶ demonstration projects integrating patient safety practices into nursing education programs and enhancing the leadership of nurses in patient safety initiatives within their health care setting.

With its emphasis on increasing nursing faculty, S.1604 appears to home in on the one issue compounding the nursing shortage – across the country, schools are turning away qualified applicants due to the lack of faculty to train them. In addition, with its provisions to enhance nursing education, the measure takes into account recent studies linking highly educated nurses to better patient outcomes.

Citing the country's projected need for 1.2 million new and replacement nurses by 2014, Clinton stated, "This legislation is crucial to combating our nation's nursing shortage and preventing it from turning into a crisis within our health care system." She stressed the urgency of the situation, noting that "If we don't act now, we run the risk of compromising quality and care . . . We may be facing a nursing shortage today, but we are setting ourselves up for a nursing crisis if we don't address this issue now."

From the States . . .

Maryland Nursing School Partners with Army Nurse Corps

To help address its faculty shortage, the University of Maryland School of Nursing has formed an innovative partnership with the Army Nurse Corps (ANC). The pilot program calls for up to eight ANC officers to serve as undergraduate nursing faculty, at no cost to the school, for a maximum of two academic years. The first six ANC nurse educators began teaching this semester. As part of the agreement, the School of Nursing provides formal faculty orientation and training for the new ANC faculty members.

Speaking for the ANC, Gale S. Pollack, acting army surgeon general and commander of the Army Medical Command, cited three important reasons for the program. "First, the nursing shortage is exacerbated by a lack of faculty . . . Army nurses are the best in our military and we can help address that national faculty shortage. Second, these Army nurses will be role models for student nurses, so it will assist us with recruiting. Third, many of the nurses in the ANC want to teach and serve as faculty . . . an option like this helps me retain these excellent nurses as well."

For the School of Nursing, Dean Janet D. Allan cited the benefits of the program to both parties. "Faculty shortages across the nation are limiting student capacity. This mutually beneficial program will help us tackle our faculty shortage, allow us to continue educating large numbers of undergraduate students, and help the Army enhance officer training. It is a win-win situation for both parties."

The University of Maryland School of Nursing has a long history of preparing military nurses,

and has graduated more than 1,000 military nurses over many decades.

Michigan's Nurse Shortage: No Easy Fix

Although Governor Jennifer Granholm (D) has made Michigan's nursing shortage a priority, the fact is the state's 53 nursing schools are turning away half of their applicants, exacerbating the impending shortage that some fear could lead to a closure of operating rooms. In the past three years, amid Michigan's high unemployment and a drive to re-educate the state's work force, nursing schools applications doubled to 16,000. Yet, as state officials take actions to avoid the shortage of nurses predicted to reach 18,000 by 2015, roughly half of the applicants are denied admission or put on waiting lists for up to two years.

Jeanette Klemczak, the state's first chief nurse executive appointed by Granholm in 2004 to develop a plan to stop the shortage, noted that programs are under way to improve the efficiency of nursing education. She cited plans in southeast Michigan for an Internet-based system to place students in clinical training spots at hospitals and to reduce redundancies in their orientation on matters such as privacy laws – problems that make it difficult for students to clock the clinical hours required to complete their programs.

But Klemczak also sounded an alarm about the quality of health care as the system faces an unprecedented stress with baby boomers reaching retirement at the very time many nurses plan to retire. "If you're short 18,000, that's an absolute crisis," Klemczak said. "If we don't have those nurses, we're going to be in a dire situation. We'll find ourselves with closed operating rooms and less hospital beds available to patients. It will slow down the whole delivery of the health care process."

According to experts, a lack of qualified faculty and training opportunities at hospitals has caused the bottleneck. Granholm was able to

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leverage \$30 million in federal money for fast-track programs such as those at Henry Ford Community College and Wayne State University that train graduates with bachelor's degrees in science to be certified in a year. In addition, one aspect of the state's Nursing Corps – a unit proposed by Granholm in her 2007 State of the State address – is to provide stipends to nurses so they could give up their jobs to complete master's degrees and become teachers. On the other hand, her three-year \$45 million proposal to train nurses as faculty that she also presented in her State of the State address remains under debate.

All those who are trying to address the problem agree that ongoing funding is key. They also cite as a major factor of the problem the salary disparity between nurses and the teachers who train them.

New York Nursing Education Bill in Committee

A bill that awards funding to New York colleges and health care providers so they can educate more nurses, and thereby help to alleviate New York's nurse shortage, has been referred to committee in both houses of the state Legislature. The legislation, sponsored by Senator George Maziarz (R-Newfane), authorizes the New York Department of Labor to provide funding to schools of nursing, educational institutions, and health care providers to develop pilot initiatives to train nursing students. According to the Healthcare Association of New York State, which is lobbying to have the legislation passed, the money can be used for recruitment and retention, hiring faculty, and developing partnerships and infrastructure.

Rhode Island Offers Liberal Loan Programs for Nurses/Nurse Educators

The Rhode Island Student Loan Authority (RISLA) recently announced two incentive programs designed to draw more students into the fields of nursing and nursing education, and to keep them working in the state for at least four years. Both programs, which according to RISLA "are among the most generous incentives in the country for encouraging

and retaining nurses and nurse faculty members," offer interest-free loans to help nurses pay off their student debt in addition to some loan forgiveness.

To encourage nursing school graduates to work in Rhode Island upon graduation, RISLA's Nursing Rewards Program offers an interest-free Stafford Loan and \$1,000 per year of principal forgiveness during the first four years of repayment. In order to qualify for the program, an applicant must be an RN or LPN licensed to practice in Rhode Island and currently providing direct care to patients at a licensed Rhode Island facility.

The second program – aimed at offsetting a looming shortage of nursing faculty members in the state – offers an interest-free Stafford Loan, along with \$5,000 per year of principal forgiveness during the first four years. In order to qualify for this program, an applicant must be a nurse with a master's degree and teaching at one of the state's nursing schools.

RISLA executive director Noel Simpson explained that the programs are being offered to combat the state's nurse shortage, which is predicted to increase to as much as 25 percent in 2010 and 55 percent by 2020, as well as the growing shortage of faculty members in the state's nursing schools. The nurse educator shortage, Simpson said, could lead to delays in students completing their nursing degrees and put further strain on Rhode Island's health care system.

Tennessee Loan Forgiveness Program Meets Goal

Tennessee's Graduate Nursing Loan Forgiveness Program, which was signed into law in 2006 to counteract the state's nursing faculty shortage, has reached its \$1.4 million goal to fund nursing education. The money was raised through public and private contributions by health care organizations across the state.

The program will pay for up to 100 RNs to return to school beginning in the fall of this year, and will send up to 100 RNs back to school for graduate classes each year.

Nurses who earn graduate degrees through the program are expected to teach undergraduate nursing studies for four years in exchange for forgiveness of their student loans. The first class has 62 nurses.

The BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee is the program's largest supporter, contributing \$700,000. Other major corporate donors include Caremark Rx, HCA, Saint Thomas Health Services, and Tennessee Hospital Association member hospitals.

Legislation Enabling Texas Nursing School Expansion Enacted

On August 14, Texas governor Rick Perry (R), joined by state legislators and Stephen F. Austin State University leaders, ceremonially signed House Bill 1775, allowing the school to issue up to \$13 million in revenue bonds to expand, renovate, and construct School of Nursing facilities. Several months earlier, the DeWitt family had presented to the university a gift of land and facilities, valued at \$1.4 million, to house the expansion. Upon Perry's signing House Bill 1775, the measure retroactively took effect on June 15.

"I am especially pleased to sign this bill because it formalizes a partnership between a

government committed to incentives instead of handouts, a community pledged to support education, and a school that is willing to invest in a bold vision for the future," said Perry. "As a state, we are at our best when people at the local level address local challenges with local solutions. This is a prime example of that spirit of ownership, innovation and investment."

According to the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies, Texas will have 27,000 fewer nurses than needed in 2010 if current trends continue unchecked. In East Texas, nearly 10 percent of nursing jobs go unfilled. At the same time, nursing schools across the state are forced to turn away thousands of candidates each year due to limited facilities and a shortage of instructors.

During the most recent legislative session, Perry called for increased state funding to address the nursing shortage. The result was an appropriation of \$24.7 million for the Professional Nursing Shortage Reduction Program to recruit and retain nursing faculty, a \$9 million increase during FY 2006-07. The 2008-09 budget also allocates \$4 million in proceeds from the tobacco lawsuit settlement to support innovative nursing education programs.

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