



Full Year Continuing Resolution for FY 2007

On December 11, the incoming chairmen of the House and Senate appropriations committees – Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) and Representative Dave Obey (D-WI) – issued a joint press release announcing that they intend to do a full year 2007 continuing resolution without congressional earmarks. Their statement outlined the general framework for how the Democrats plan to pursue and pass the remaining FY 2007 appropriations bills. In short, they have decided to simply pass a year-long continuing resolution that will fund the government at FY 2006 levels instead of passing the remaining bills. This means that the Nursing Workforce Development Programs – Title VIII – will be funded at the same level as FY 2006.

The press release stated, “Despite the best efforts of the chairmen of the Appropriations Committees, the GOP has ended the year without so much as completing work on a single appropriations bill that invests in our

communities, provides for the medical care of our veterans, helps to fight crime in our communities, or works to make college more affordable. . . . As incoming Chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, we are now responsible for finding a way out of this fiscal mayhem. It is important that we clear the decks quickly so that we can get to work on the American people's priorities, the President's anticipated war funding request, and a new budget.”

They went on to say, “There will be no Congressional earmarks in the joint funding resolution that we will pass. We will place a moratorium on all earmarks until a reformed process is put in place.”

The last time each of the appropriations bills were passed by Congress individually and signed into law on time was 1994 – the last year that Byrd and Obey chaired the Appropriations Committees.

Idaho Governor Acts to Ease Nurse Shortage

In this issue . . .

Full Year Continuing Resolution for FY 2007 . . . . . 1
Idaho Governor Acts to Ease Nurse Shortage . . . . . 1
Schools Not Meeting California's Need for Nurses . . . . . 2

Governor Jim Risch (R-ID) recently announced that his proposed state budget for next year will include more than \$37 million for new nurse-training buildings at two of the state's colleges. He explained that the proposed funding will open up more seats to nursing students in an attempt to fend off the state's imminent nursing shortage. The monies are to be specifically designated for a \$21.1 million building at the two-year College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls and a \$16 million building at Lewis-Clark State in Lewiston. (Cont'd page 2)

## Idaho Governor Acts to Ease Nurse Shortage (Cont'd from page 1)

Risch, a lieutenant governor who stepped in for a seven-month term as governor when President Bush tapped former Governor Dirk Kempthorne (R) for interior secretary, has made the nursing shortage a priority. During his inaugural address in June, he noted that, because of the shortage of faculty and classroom space, Idaho will have only 40 percent of the nurses needed to care for its aging population by 2020. To address the problem, he brought together an 18-member task force of nurses, educators, and politicians. Then, on October 31, a few days after receiving the group's recommendations (which called for: \$7.6 million to create 400 more seats for nursing students in Idaho's public colleges and universities in the next two years; \$600,000 to boost financial aid for nursing students; and \$6.5 million to raise nursing instructors' salaries), Risch announced his budget proposal saying, "This will go a long way to getting Idaho up to speed on addressing our nursing shortage."

For the financing, Risch said he will ask the Legislature to take \$18.5 million from the state's \$208 million surplus to begin the construction, and buy 20-year bonds to cover the \$18.5 million remaining. He added, "I'm not totally set in stone on this funding, but I want the Legislature to look at this and come up with an appropriate mechanism for funding." He also said that he will lobby the Legislature to provide additional money to phase in the task force recommendations.

After touring most of the state's colleges and universities, Risch said he discovered that Lewis-Clark College and the College of Southern Idaho had the most need. The planned new nursing buildings at the two schools are to feature biology and chemistry classrooms, laboratories, hospital-room technology, and mannequins designed for use in simulating medical scenarios.

While the proposed budget will be left for the state's next governor, Risch expressed confidence – even before the November election results were known – that whoever took office would not reverse his efforts on nursing. Indeed, it appears that will be the case. For, in addition to Butch Otter (R) having won the election for governor, Risch also won the election for lieutenant governor and will return to that post – where, he said, "I fully intend to see this through."

## Schools Not Meeting California's Need for Nurses

**D**espite the mandate requiring its hospitals to maintain certain nurse-patient ratios, California ranks last among states and the District of Columbia in nurses per 100,000 population. While the nurse shortage is critical throughout the state, at hospitals in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties it is at near-crisis level. In those counties the average number of nurses per 100,000 people is 477, whereas the national average is 787 nurses per 100,000 people. Yet, California's nursing schools are turning away thousands of applicants each year.

A survey by the Californians for Patient Care, a nonprofit patient-advocacy group based in

Sacramento, found that more than 80 percent of qualified applicants were turned away for the fall semester. Kristine Yahn, the group's executive director, cited three problems: "... lack of space, lack of faculty, and lack of money." Yahn continued, "But the limitation right now basically is faculty."

No matter how hard hospitals try to recruit and retain nurses, the schools simply are not producing enough nurses. Riverside Community College, for example, turned away 593 of 713 applicants, or 83 percent. Cal State San Bernardino accepts only 160 applicants of the 400 to 600 who apply each year, an average of 32 percent. Schools throughout the state

(Cont'd page 3)

## **Schools Not Meeting California's Need for Nurses** (Cont'd from page 2)

report similar admission rates. In addition, Yahn pointed out that community colleges typically lose 25 to 30 percent of their nursing students during their first semester due to either academic difficulty or financial hardship.

California's hospitals need 14,000 nurses immediately. By not meeting their mandated nurse-patient ratios as specified by the Department of Health Services (one nurse for every two intensive-care patients; one nurse for every five medical/surgical ward patients; one nurse for every four pediatric patients; and one nurse for every four recovering mothers with babies), hospitals risk having beds, whole units, or even their EDs shut down.

Considering that the average RN in California is 48 years old, and that aging baby boomers are expected to drive up hospital demand 40 percent by 2020, it appears that the problem is only going to get worse. Furthermore, with more than 81 percent of nursing school instructors age 51 or older, the difficulty in replacing such faculty after their retirement due to the marked income disparity must also be taken into account. A nurse with a master's degree can earn \$120,000 a year in a hospital in California, but only about half that in a teaching position.

Given their desperate situation, hospitals are trying some innovative ways to recruit and retain nurses. San Bernardino County's hospital has begun using a nursing registry and has spent more than \$3 million in recent years to attract nurses. To increase retention, the hospital also provides mentors for new graduates. Other tactics, such as those employed by St. Bernardine Medical Center in San Bernardino, include advertisements – highlighting salaries, health-care plans, and a \$10,000 sign-on bonus – placed along interstates, in nursing publications, on radio, and via direct mail and theater slides. St. Bernardine is also hoping to partner with nearby nursing schools to nurture and teach students during their clinical years in exchange for their working at the hospital after graduation. Other hospitals are turning to recruiting foreign nurses, often from India or the Philippines.

As for solutions, Proposition 86, the \$2.60 tobacco tax that would have provided \$92 million annually for nursing education, was defeated. Yahn had other suggestions, however. She said that, since hospitals invest \$50 million annually toward instructors, space, and equipment, it is time for major employers to contribute. She also suggested that remedial course work or financial assistance would help keep nursing students in programs and cut the dropout rate. Finally, Yahn said that, although the governor and the legislature have invested \$35 million in the past two years to expand schools, additional appropriations in the 2007-2008 state budget would be a wise investment.

According to Sandy Baker, dean of the School of Nursing at Riverside Community College, there are some promising signs. She said that her school has benefitted already from state grants, one of which paid for a school nursing satellite campus, where 50 students were admitted this year and six new faculty members were hired. Baker also commended legislation in the works that would offer stipends for nursing faculty to bring their salaries on par with what they could earn in a hospital, but added that she also would like to see the state forgive student loans for new nurses who choose to teach.