

News

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Harkin: senate stimulus will create jobs, modernize our schools and healthcare system

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) today joined his colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee in unveiling a job creation measure to spur the nation's flailing economy. The bill is expected to be acted on soon by the Senate with hopes of reaching the President's desk by early February. Harkin is Chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee that funds health, human services, education and labor initiatives.

The plan includes approximately \$115 billion for education initiatives, nearly \$6 billion for prevention and wellness measures and more than \$1 billion for family safety nets.

"The economy is now shedding an average of 17,000 jobs a day, and new home foreclosures are averaging 9,000 a day. We are facing what could be the deepest, longest recession since the Great Depression and economists across the political spectrum agree that we need a massive stimulus package to help revive the economy," said Harkin. "I believe we can create jobs and jolt our economy back to life while also rebuilding our communities and reforming our healthcare system. That's what this plan does."

Education

"Clearly, investing in infrastructure and directly creating jobs must be a key part of the stimulus bill. I have included \$79 billion in new funding to help states and school districts stabilize budgets and prevent tax increases and deep cuts to critical education programs," said Harkin. "In addition, I included \$16 billion to repair and renovate our public schools with a priority given to green projects. My colleagues and I also included \$3.5 billion for the renovation of higher education facilities and for equipment."

"A portion of these funds are reserved for community colleges, bearing in mind that it is the community colleges that often train workers for the jobs that will be become available in our new economy," said Harkin. "We need to make sure that they have the equipment and facilities to train tomorrow's workforce."

State Fiscal Stabilization Fund: \$79 billion in a new fund to help states and school districts stabilize budgets and prevent tax increases and deep cuts to critical education programs. The funding includes approximately \$39 billion to local school districts and public colleges and universities distributed through existing state and federal formulas; \$15 billion to states as incentive grants as a reward for meeting key performance measures; and \$25 billion to states for other high-priority needs such as public safety and other critical services, which may include education.

At least \$53.8 billion of the \$79 billion State Fiscal Stabilization Fund must be used for elementary, secondary and higher education. The funding will enable school districts to make education reforms, avoid teachers layoffs, and help colleges hold down tuition costs.

School Modernization: \$16 billion to repair, renovate and construct public schools in ways that will raise energy efficiency and provide greater access to information technology and \$3.5 billion to improve higher education facilities.

Education Technology: \$1 billion to provide up-to-date computers and other hardware and software and teacher training.

Title I: \$13 billion to help close the achievement gap and enable disadvantaged students to reach their potential.

- Special Education/IDEA: \$13 billion to improve educational outcomes for disabled children. This level of funding will increase the Federal share of special education services to its highest level ever.

- IDEA Early Childhood Education: \$500 million for formula grants to help states serve children with disabilities age 2 and younger. Additionally, at least 15 percent of funds available from the \$13 billion investment in Part B Grants for Special Education must be used for services to pre-school-age disabled children.

Education for the Homeless: \$70 million to provide transportation and other critical services to the growing number of children whose families have lost their homes because of the foreclosure crisis and rising unemployment.

- Pell Grants: \$13.9 billion to increase the Pell Grant maximum award and pay for increases in program costs resulting from increased eligibility and higher Pell Grant awards. The bill supports an increased Pell Grant maximum award of \$281 in the 2009-2010 academic year and \$400 in the 2010-2011 academic year. This aid will help 7 million students pursue postsecondary education.

Improving Teacher Quality: \$100 million for competitive grants to address teacher shortages and strengthen teacher preparation and support activities.

Child Care Development Block Grant: \$2 billion to provide quality child care services for an additional 300,000 children in low-income families who increasingly are unable to afford the high cost of day care.

Head Start & Early Head Start: \$2.1 billion to allow an additional 124,000 children to participate in this program, which provides development, educational, health, nutritional, social and other activities that prepare children to succeed in school.

Health Care

"We must change the structure of our health care system so that it truly keeps people healthy, which means investing in prevention and wellness," said Harkin. "I have included \$5.8 billion in new funding to fight preventable diseases and conditions. This initiative includes grants to communities for health promotion, immunization programs, health screenings and counseling, smoking cessation programs, scholarships and loan repayment for health professionals, research, and evidence-based disease prevention strategies."

"To fix and modernize our economy we need to do the same with our health care system. To that end, I have included funds to boost health information technology, which will both reduce medical errors and increase efficiency," said Harkin. "I have also included money for research in comparative effectiveness of health care practices. We need to know what works and what doesn't, which will result in better health outcomes."

- Health Information Technology: \$5 billion to jumpstart efforts to computerize health records to cut costs and reduce medical errors.

- Prevention and Wellness: \$5.8 billion to fight preventable diseases and conditions with evidence-based strategies, including:
 - \$750 million for immunizations
 - \$1 billion for additional health screenings and education to prevent chronic illnesses
 - \$400 million for grants to communities for health promotion
 - \$75 million for additional smoking cessation programs
 - \$600 million for training of health professionals including equipment, scholarships and loan repayment
 - \$65 million for grants to States to upgrade newborn screening and vital statistics equipment
 - \$400 million for HIV and STD testing programs
 - \$60 million for research and surveys on the current state of health and best ways to reduce health care costs
- Community Health Centers: \$1 billion to construct and renovate clinics, and make health information technology improvements. Community health centers serve 20 percent of the nation's uninsured population.
- Pandemic Flu Preparedness: \$870 million to complete funding for the pandemic influenza preparedness initiative.

National Institutes of Health: \$3.5 billion to conduct biomedical research in areas such as cancer, Alzheimer's, heart disease and stem cells, and to improve NIH facilities.

Comparative Effectiveness Research: \$1.1 billion to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, NIH and the HHS Office of the Secretary to evaluate the relative effectiveness of different health care services and treatment options. Expanding this research has the potential to greatly improve health care quality.

Employment Services

"Over the past year, unemployment has grown by 3.6 million persons, and the long-term unemployed, those who have been out of work for 27 weeks or more, now represent nearly one-quarter of all unemployed individuals," said Harkin. "This bill makes additional investments that will help workers train for and connect with jobs, and help develop the workforce needed for the work of tomorrow."

- Training and Employment Services: \$3.7 billion for job training including formula grants for adult, dislocated worker, and youth services (including \$1.2 billion to create up to one million summer jobs for youth). The training and employment needs of workers also will be met through dislocated worker national emergency grants, new competitive grants for worker training in high growth and emerging industry sectors (with priority consideration to "green" jobs and healthcare), and increased funds for the Job Corps and YouthBuild programs. Green jobs training will include preparing workers for activities supported by other economic recovery funds, such as retrofitting of buildings, green construction, and the production of renewable electric power.

- Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants: \$500 million for state formula grants to help individuals with disabilities prepare and sustain gainful employment.
- Employment Services Grants: \$400 million to match unemployed individuals to job openings through state employment service agencies and allow states to provide customized reemployment services.
- Community Service Employment for Older Americans: \$120 million to provide subsidized community service jobs to an additional 24,000 low-income older Americans.

Human Services

"Hardworking men and women are being laid off from their jobs and families are struggling. Now is the time to extend a helping hand to those folks who are suffering most from this downturn," said Harkin. "Older Americans and those with disabilities are especially vulnerable to rising prices and cuts to social programs, so I am thankful we have chosen to protect those individuals and ensure they have the basic necessities."

Social Services Block Grant: \$400 million for states and local non-profits to deliver critical services to unemployed and low-income individuals struggling with the effects of the recession.

Community Services Block Grant: \$200 million to local community action agencies (CAAs) for services to the growing numbers of low-income families hurt by the economic crisis, such as housing and mortgage counseling, jobs skills training, food pantry assistance, as well as benefits outreach and enrollment.

Senior Meals: \$100 million to help senior meals programs cope with steep increases in food and fuel costs. Many programs are reducing meal deliveries to seniors or closing meal sites. The funding in the bill will result in an additional 30,000 meals served.

Centers for Independent Living: \$110 million for Centers for Independent Living and other programs that help individuals with disabilities continue to live in their communities, while easing further pressure on Medicaid budgets.

- AmeriCorps Programs: \$200 million to put additional AmeriCorps members to work doing national service, meeting needs of vulnerable populations and communities during the recession. Of these funds, \$65 million is targeted toward programs that serve small organizations hit hardest by rising need and declining resources. Also included in these funds is \$10 million to increase the number of participants in the National Civilian Community Corps. One of the five centers is located in Vinton, Iowa.

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