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Republicans Close To Own Deal On Job Training Bill

In the wake of failed bipartisan conference negotiations, House and Senate Republicans were close Wednesday to finalizing a bill among themselves to consolidate scores of federal job-training programs.

Meetings were continuing in an effort to work out details of the bill, which has been mired by partisan disputes over funding and state flexibility, conservative opposition and presidential politics. Republicans announced Tuesday they would proceed on a strictly partisan basis, even if running the risk of a Democratic filibuster or a presidential veto.

The House approved the bill on a 345-79 vote last Sept. 19, while the Senate passed its version on a 95-2 vote last Oct. 11.

So far, Republicans — at the urging of GOP governors — have agreed on a voucher pilot program for dislocated workers, leaving it up to the governors to determine the size and scope of each state’s program, sources said Wednesday.

Republicans rejected a demand from President Clinton to provide a $1.3 billion set-aside for states to provide vouchers to all dislocated workers.

Michigan GOP Gov. John Engler, chairman of the Republican Governors Association, met this week with congressional Republicans working on the legislation and urged them to provide maximum flexibility to the states to administer the job-training and vocational education programs.

Republicans have complained the administration and Senate Democrats have been advocating the status quo through proposals to retain more power over the programs with the Labor and Education departments.

In all, the programs that would be consolidated under the legislation — relating to job-training, vocational education, adult education and programs for dislocated workers — would amount to nearly $5 billion under the FY97 Labor-HHS appropriations bill, which the House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to mark up today.

The evolving GOP job-training consolidation bill would not contain a specific proposed authorization level, leaving the funding decision entirely up to appropriators. The authorization bill, which would take effect July 1, 1998, then would use “such sums” as were appropriated in the previous fiscal year.

Republicans still have several minor issues left to resolve, sources said, including specifics of a proposed repeal of the administration’s school-to-work program. It appeared the GOP bill would repeal the program, but still allow states to continue a similar kind of program if they choose.

House Leaders May Set China MFN Schedule Today

House Republican leaders are expected to decide today when the resolution of disapproval on extending most favored nation trading status to China will come to the House floor and what, if any, legislation may be considered along with it.

GOP leaders Wednesday decided the resolution of disapproval — rejected Tuesday by the House Ways and Means Committee — will go to the House Rules Committee before coming to the floor, Rules Chairman Solomon said.

If the resolution of disapproval went right to the floor without going through Rules first, there could be up to 20 hours of floor debate about it. House GOP leaders, who generally support China MFN, apparently did not want opponents to have half of that 20 hours to try to make their case.

Also Wednesday, Treasury Secretary Rubin, Acting Trade Representative Barshevsky and White House national security official Sandy Berger came to Capitol Hill to brief what was supposed to be a group of China MFN backers.

MFN opponents apparently were not invited to the session. However, the MFN opponents found out about it, and at least one of them — Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio — came to the poorly attended meeting, which attracted only about a dozen members.

The decision to exclude MFN opponents from the session angered at least one anti-MFN member.

“The administration has put a full-court press on this issue and unfortunately, they are choosing to have a dialogue only with their friends and have done little to try and find common ground with those who are concerned about the issue,” an aide to the anti-MFN member told CongressDaily.

“This is clearly an effort by the administration only to provide information to their supporters and this is not how the dialogue should go. Their lobbying tactics are beginning to cross the line — the line of propriety, the line of ethics, the line of political discourse,” the aide added.

Rep. Robert Matsui, D-Calif., one of the pro-MFN members who helped organize the session with the administration officials, acknowledged opponents probably had not been invited, but did not seem overly concerned about the criticism.

“I haven’t been invited to any meetings that the anti-MFN people have called. but I’m not going to whine about it,” Matsui said. “I’m glad they were interested enough [in the meeting] to be offended.”

After the meeting with Rubin and the others, Kaptur told reporters Rubin had stressed how much extending MFN to China was of “symbolic value” to other Eastern Asia countries and that it was important to pursue other U.S. concerns with China outside of the MFN debate.

Berger said the Chinese should not be treated “like pariahs” and suggested that if the United States abandons China, China will link itself with other, more hostile nations, Kaptur said.