

1996

Consolidated and Reformed Workforce Development and Literacy Act (1976): Correspondence 02

Norman B. Rice

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THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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Labor

May 15, 1996

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Executive Director:

J. THOMAS COCHRAN

Dear Senator:

As a member of the Conference Committee on workforce development legislation, HR 1617 and S143, you have been deliberating since last winter on the differences between these two pieces of legislation. One of the major differences concerns the role of local elected officials.

As president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I am alarmed by recent news that the House Conference staff has offered language that virtually eliminates the role of local elected officials in the employment training system envisioned by these bills and reduces the role of local workforce boards. We need to strengthen, not reduce, the authority of these local boards and their critical relationship to local elected officials. The language in HR 1617, or language that is similar, is necessary to realize the goal of a consolidated employment training system.

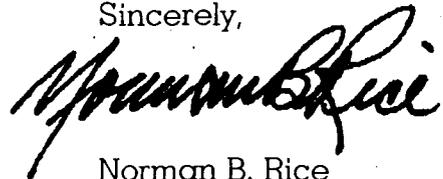
The Conference of Mayors policy supports consolidation but only with a significant role for the mayor or chief local elected official. We do not believe a "new" system is going to be any better than the current system unless there is balance and participation by all the critical partners. We support the intent of both these bills to consolidate many of the existing federal programs, but without partnerships the goal of an improved system will be elusive. None of the partners (business, state and local elected officials, organized labor, education, or community groups) can improve the current system on their own. There must be a real partnership, and that can only occur when we have shared responsibility and accountability. We thought HR 1617 was a good vehicle to begin achieving that balance.

There must be strong local workforce boards with program and fiscal responsibility. There must also be strong involvement of local elected officials with appointment authority for these local workforce boards, as well as review and approval of the workforce boards' plans, budgets and service systems, and joint review and evaluation with the workforce board of local programs. The language we are now hearing-- leaving local elected with no meaningful role and reducing the local workforce boards--certainly does not achieve a balance. The U.S. Conference of Mayors opposes any lessening of the role of the chief local elected official.

Experience demonstrates that local business, education, organized labor, community groups, and elected officials know best what their collective needs are in achieving a qualified workforce earning family-sustainable wages. The state government must play that vital role in assuring that those of us at the local level are coordinated statewide and striving toward a unified state goal. Local partners need to plan and direct the local system within the statewide framework.

We hope you will support a continuing strong role for local elected officials and workforce boards similar to that expressed HR 1617.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norman B. Rice". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Norman B. Rice
President of the
U.S. Conference of Mayors
Mayor of Seattle