



The Politics of Caring

By Erin McKeon

Where Is the Funding?

Several proposed bills merit your voice and attention.

HOUSE FALLS SHORT ON HEALTH FUNDING BILL

The House Appropriations Committee approved its version of the fiscal year (FY) 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act on June 13, 2006. This bill (HR 5647) provides no increase in funding for nursing education and recruitment. At press time, the bill was stalled in the House because of partisan arguments over the minimum wage, and the Senate was preparing its version of the bill.

FUNDING FOR NURSING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The ANA is seeking an additional \$25 million for the federally funded Nursing Workforce Development programs for FY 2007. These programs, authorized by Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act, are the primary means of federal funding for nursing recruitment, education, and retention. If obtained, this increase would bring funding for Title VIII to \$175 million for the FY 2007. The ANA's funding request was supported by a bipartisan group of 156 members of the House of Representatives.

The ANA maintains that this increase in funding is critical to address the escalating nursing shortage. The demand for RNs in the United States will increase 29% by 2014, according to the Department of Labor as reported in the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* (Winter 2005–06). There needs to be an additional 1.2 million RNs to meet the demand of increased patient needs and to replace retiring nurses.

Unfortunately, the funding bill approved by the House Appropriations

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Committee contains no increase at all for Title VIII. The ANA encourages you to convince the Senate to provide a funding increase. Contact your senators and explain the impact of the nursing shortage on your ability to provide high-quality care. Visit www.anapoliticalpower.org for resource materials, information on your senators, and sample draft letters.

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RESPIRATORY PROTECTIONS

In addition to failing to address the nursing shortage, the House appropriations bill contains a potentially dangerous rider that places nurses at increased risk for contracting airborne infections. The provision, added by Representative Roger Wicker (R-MS), would remove the ability of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to mandate annual fit-testing of respirators in health care settings. This ban seriously undermines the effectiveness of these respirators and needlessly places nurses at increased risk for contracting and transmitting infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and avian flu.

Annual fit testing is necessary to ensure that the person wearing the respirator obtains a proper seal. Minor changes in weight, dental work, facial hair, and improper donning of the mask can cause the respirator to fail and increase the risk of infection. OSHA has found that as many as

50% of health care workers fail to obtain a proper fit without annual fit-testing. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has found that non-fit-tested respirators expose the wearer to eight times more contaminant than those that are fit-tested.

The ANA is particularly concerned about this rider, given the need to prepare for a potential pandemic flu outbreak. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, OSHA, and NIOSH have released guidelines that support annual fit-testing of respirators used to protect health care workers from avian flu, but these guidelines are not enforceable—only the OSHA standard that Representative Wicker seeks to weaken is. Help oppose this rider by contacting your congressional representative. Visit the ANA's advocacy center at www.anapoliticalpower.org for more information and draft letters to Congress.

MOVING FORWARD

This is the next to the last *Politics of Caring* column written by the Department of Government Affairs at the ANA. You can continue to receive monthly updates on federal legislation and regulation, state legislative trends, and politics by reading the ANA's monthly newsletter, Capitol Update, online (www.capitolupdate.org) or by signing up for the e-mail version. The ANA also encourages you to get involved—you can find your congressional representatives, read about current issues, and send letters to Capitol Hill through the Government Affairs Web site at www.anapoliticalpower.org. These sites are available to both ANA members and nonmembers. ▼