



**CAPITOL HILL UPDATE
FEBRUARY 2021**

KEY PROVISIONS IN THE HOUSE COVID PACKAGE DRAFT AS IT NEARS HOUSE VOTE. The House of Representatives is currently in the process of considering the next COVID relief bill with a vote expected as soon as Friday. It will then go to the Senate for consideration, where all provisions will have to pass muster with the Senate Parliamentarian.

The legislation is largely similar to President Biden's "[American Rescue Plan](#)." A few differences exist: The House plan shortens the unemployment extension by one month in order to save money so it could add grants for addressing several multiemployer pension issues, but not composite plans. It also earmarks some of the small business aid for restaurants, provides grants to airlines and airports, and contains more targeted expansions to Medicaid, but does not contain cybersecurity funding.

As expected, it contains a third round of stimulus checks, extension of enhanced unemployment benefits, additional tax credits for families and workers, funding for K-12 education facilities, and support for state and local governments. Smaller, but-significant, expenditures include funds for COVID testing and vaccines, grants to small businesses, support for childcare providers, assistance for colleges, and rental and homelessness assistance. Under the Reconciliation process, the bill would need only 51 votes to pass the Senate with the Vice President casting the deciding vote in the event of a 50-50 tie vote. However, under Reconciliation, all items must be revenue related and the Parliamentarian must rule provisions in order.

MAJOR COMPREHENSIVE INFRASTRUCTURE PACKAGE UNDER DISCUSSION. President Joe Biden moved the talk about new federal infrastructure legislation into a new phase, convening a White House meeting with Senate public-works leaders to discuss broad principles they would like to see reflected in the envisioned legislation.

At the meeting, held on Feb 11 in the Oval Office, the administration was represented by Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. A comprehensive, multi-sector infrastructure package would involve several Senate committees, each of which has jurisdiction over aspects of the hoped-for package. Multiple House committees also will play critical roles.

But this initial session focused just on the Senate and more specifically, on the Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW), which has jurisdiction over highway authorizations and policy, the presumed cornerstone of an infrastructure measure.

The Senate meeting included EPW Chairman Tom Carper (D-Del.); Shelley Moore Capito (W.Va.), the committee's top Republican; Ben Cardin (D-Md.); and James Inhofe (R- Okla.). Cardin and Inhofe are key members of EPW's transportation and infrastructure subcommittee. Inhofe also is a former chairman of the full committee. On the House side, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) has largely completed the House outline using the infrastructure bill passed last summer with substantial support for retrofitting federal facilities and transit centers across the nation, especially public schools.

IRAP – PRESIDENT KILLS MISGUIDED PROGRAM WITH EXECUTIVE ORDER. Ahead of a meeting with labor officials Wednesday afternoon, the White House said President Biden would revoke the never-implemented but in-effect IRAP training program, creating an industry-led apprenticeship program, which sought to reduce the federal government's role in creating and monitoring such training opportunities.



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The Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Program (IRAP), created as a result of former President Trump's order, has been criticized by the Building Trades, SMACNA, and signatory contractor groups, who warned that it did not allow the government to properly oversee the programs it was funding for quality control and effectiveness.

The Biden White House argued that the program has "fewer quality standards" than registered apprenticeship programs that are overseen by the Labor Department. Biden's Wednesday executive action will direct the agency to issue a rulemaking to dismantle the Trump-era program and reinstate a National Advisory Committee on Apprenticeships to provide guidance to the agency.

Biden instead is endorsing Democrats' **National Apprenticeship Act**, which passed the House with bipartisan support earlier this month. That bill would expand registered apprenticeship, youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs, an effort that should create up to one million new skilled apprentices and generate billions of dollars in benefits for taxpayers and a higher quality construction workforce needed for the complex projects of the future.

SMACNA URGES SENATE PASSAGE OF BIPARTISAN NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP ACT, H.R. 447. SMACNA urged quick Senate consideration and passage of the House passed bipartisan **H.R. 447, The National Apprenticeship Act of 2021**. Introduced by Representatives Bobby Scott (D-VA-3), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-1), Don Norcross (D-NJ-1), David McKinley (R-WVA-1) and more than a dozen cosponsors, H.R. 447 passed the House February 5th by a **bipartisan vote of 247-173** with dozens of GOP votes in favor of expanded workforce training quality. At a time where too many industry firms cry out for greater numbers of skilled workers but exhibit little interest in funding quality registered apprenticeship training, H.R. 447 is needed and worthy of federal support and encouragement.

Reauthorization of the National Apprenticeship Act that would create nearly one million new Registered Apprenticeship, youth apprenticeship, and pre-apprenticeship positions over the next five years. The National Apprenticeship Act of 2021 invests nearly \$3.5 billion over five years to scale-up apprenticeship opportunities, streamline access to apprenticeships for workers and employers and expand apprenticeships into new in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

According to the Department of Labor, 94 percent of apprentices who complete Registered Apprenticeships are employed upon completion, earning an average starting wage of above \$70,000 annually. Yet, according to the most recent data, only **0.3 percent of the overall workforce in America have completed an apprenticeship**.

The proposal's historic investments in workforce training would not only benefit workers and their families but would save American taxpayers an estimated \$10.6 billion in the form of increased tax revenues from higher worker pay and productivity and decreased spending on public-assistance programs and unemployment insurance.

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