Brown Leads Eight Senators in Calling on Appropriations Committee to Fully Fund Critical Retraining Program for Workers

Brown Urged Appropriations Leadership to Maintain Funding Levels for Trade Adjustment Assistance to Help Workers Who Lose Their Jobs Due to Trade

Wednesday, November 26, 2014

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown led a group of eight senators called for the Senate Appropriations Committee to fully fund a critical retraining program for workers who lose their jobs due to foreign trade. In a letter to U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and U.S. Sen. Richard C. Shelby (R-AL), Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the senators also urged the leaders to include a short-term reauthorization of the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program in the Fiscal Year 2015 omnibus appropriations bill. Unless Congress acts, the program is set to expire Dec. 31, 2014.

“For decades, TAA has provided workers and companies with resources to better compete in the face of imports or offshoring,” the senators wrote. “We strongly support reauthorization of TAA before the program expires on December 31, 2014.”

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), approximately two million workers nationwide have relied on TAA since 1975 to make ends meet and receive training necessary to find a new job.

Joining Brown in signing the letter were U.S. Sens. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Charles E. Schumer (D-NY), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Tom Carper (D-DE), Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Robert P. Casey (D-PA).

Last week, Brown introduced the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act of 2014, legislation that would reauthorize the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program and expand its training and reemployment services to 2009 levels.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Extend the TAA program through the end of 2020 to ensure certainty to workers and firms impacted by trade.
- Restore eligibility to levels included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to include service sector and public sector workers who lost their jobs due to trade from any trading partner. Currently, only manufacturing-sector workers, farmers, and fishers affected by trade from our Free Trade Agreement partners are eligible for the program.
• Provide continued unemployment benefits while workers are in training by extending the number of weeks workers are eligible for Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA) from 65 to 78.
• Cover job search and relocation expenses of up to $1,500 and increase supplemental wages that can be paid to workers 50 years of age or older if their new job pays less than their previous job.
• Ensure workers can afford their health care even after being laid off by reauthorizing the Health Care Tax Credit (HCTC) – which expired at the end of 2013 – and by increasing the amount of the tax credit from 72.5 to 80 percent of the insurance premium.
• Fund TAA at the previous level of $575 million and Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms at $50 million to provide financial assistance and expertise to import-affected manufacturers to help them become more competitive.

Brown has been a long-time advocate for the TAA program and efforts to ensure workers have the training and tools they need to fill jobs in high-growth industries. In Feb. 2011, Brown led 13 senators in urging House leadership to extend TAA. As one of the last acts before 111th Congress adjourned, Brown secured a six-week extension of the TAA program, in addition to the HCTC. Brown fought to extend the program for 18 months, but the Senate only cleared a six-week extension, leaving it up to the new Congress to reconsider the issue.

Full text of the letter to Appropriations leadership is below and here.

November 26, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S128 Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
146A Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Mikulski and Vice Chairman Shelby:

As you continue to prepare the Fiscal Year 2015 omnibus appropriations bill, we write to thank you for your support for the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. In addition, we ask
you to maintain the Senate position on TAA in negotiations with the House of Representatives on appropriations legislation.

For decades TAA has provided workers and companies with resources to better compete in the face of imports or offshoring. We strongly support reauthorization of TAA before the program expires on December 31, 2014. Unfortunately, that seems unlikely, and we anticipate Congress will reauthorize the program early next year. To prevent a lapse in services, we ask you to include a short-term statutory authorization of TAA. Language extending TAA would give administering agencies the certainty they need to implement the program seamlessly.

Absent a full reauthorization or extension passed by Congress before the end of the year, the TAA funding levels in the appropriations bill will determine whether the program can continue in 2015 without a break in services. The Senate included the President’s request of $710 million for TAA for Workers in the fiscal year 2015 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill and $15 million for TAA for Firms in the Commerce, Justice, and Science bills. These funding levels will allow TAA to operate even if statutory authority for the program lapses, and we ask you to include them in any appropriations bill negotiated with the House.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to support our workers and companies negatively affected by trade.

Sincerely,

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