

By N. Susan Emeagwali

# Educators Flock to NPS Amidst Concerns About Budget Cuts

**“ACTE IS WORKING VIGOROUSLY TO ENSURE THAT THE VOICE OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATORS IS NOT DROWNED OUT IN THE LOUD POLITICAL DEBATES ONGOING ON CAPITOL HILL.”**



**A T A TIME OF INTENSE POLITICKING ON** Capitol Hill as legislators work feverishly to cut federal spending, and amidst more threats to slash Perkins funding, career and technical education (CTE) professionals from around the country converged on Washington, D.C., to attend the Association for Career and Technical Education’s National Policy Seminar (NPS), March 7–9. Brenda Dann-Messier, assistant secretary of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), and Jane Oates, assistant secretary of the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), were keynote speakers. In addition, panels of congressional staffers and other experts provided CTE professionals with an overview of federal programs and initiatives that relate to CTE and workforce development, and information about proposed funding cuts.

## Jan Bray: ACTE is Your Voice



ACTE is working vigorously to ensure that the voice of career and technical educators is not drowned out in the loud political debates ongoing on Capitol Hill—some of which will affect CTE, said ACTE’s Executive Director Jan Bray at the Opening General Session. The Association continues its outreach to key legislators to remind them of the value of CTE in helping to educate the nation’s youth, and prepare a skilled workforce. Everyone’s talking about job creation, Bray said, and the key is to help legislators connect the dots between CTE,

job creation and workforce development. Also important is the strength in numbers as ACTE works to secure funding and effect change.

“When you go back home, tell your colleagues that you are tired of carrying the burden alone; that if they don’t step up to the plate, there’ll be no more plate to step up to,” Bray said.

## OVAE Chief: Good Work Being Done, Challenges Remain



There is a need now more than ever to raise students’ academic performance and provide them with the skills they need to succeed in the new economy, said Dann-Messier, assistant secretary of OVAE. The United States was once the leader in the world in the number of 25- to 34-year-olds with college degrees. But that standing has dropped significantly, she said. [According to a 2010 report by the College Board, the U.S. is now 12th among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development nations in the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with a college degree.] This is very worrying, Dann-Messier said, because the recession has highlighted that those without a college degree are most affected by a dour economy. She said the U.S. needs to create 8 million more college grads by 2020 in order to compete with other nations. Winning the future will require a shift in paradigm, one that includes the idea of lifelong learning.

CTE has an important role to play in positively affecting outcomes such as

## Education Secretary's Video Message

Education Secretary Arne Duncan was not able to attend NPS, but he did have a video message for NPS attendees. He said that though the president's budget called for cuts to Perkins, the president does understand the value of CTE. The key is to strengthen career education programs before more money can be invested in them, Duncan said. **I**

postsecondary completion rates, Dann-Messier said. But the field has been plagued by inconsistencies that have only served to reinforce a negative image. Among the concerns: some programs are in need of updated equipment, better education models, and programming that is strongly linked to high-wage, high-demand careers. The new CTE recognizes that all students must have a common core of academic and transferrable skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and less need for remediation.

"The new CTE is a 21st century education that helps students acquire 21st century skills," she said.

Regarding proposed funding cuts to Perkins, Dann-Messier said the current program needs to be strengthened before it can be expanded. That is why President Obama's FY 2012 budget proposes to combine the Perkins Basic State Grant and Tech Prep programs and reduce the overall funding for these two programs to \$1 billion (resulting in a \$264 million or 21 percent cut for Perkins). The good news, she said, is that the reauthorization of Perkins will provide an opportunity to strengthen the program and link it to



▲ Top: Approximately 400 people attended ACTE's National Policy Seminar, held in Washington, D.C., March 7-9.  
▲ Bottom: A panel of experts discuss the issues driving legislation on Capitol Hill.

all education programming. To that end, OVAE will be holding meetings across the country to gather information from educators, students, parents, business and industry, and other stakeholders to inform OVAE's decision making.

### DOL: Reviving Manufacturing Key to Economic Growth



The U. S. Department of Labor's ETA is hard at work ensuring that people who are having a tough time getting back into education and training have multiple pathways of entry, said Jane Oates, assistant secretary of ETA. She noted that the recession has hit many industries hard and put many people out of work. Manufacturing has been particularly pummeled, she said, and that's bad for the economy.

"Manufacturing, unlike any other sector, creates wealth," Oates said, and it creates jobs in a multitude of areas ranging from transportation to supply companies. On the upside, the February 2011 data showed that there is growth in the manufacturing sector. But one thing that has to be addressed is the fact that young people are not attracted to this field because of their perception of it as low skill, Oates remarked. CTE has a role to play in getting the word out that manufacturing is now a field of advanced technologies requiring workers with advanced skills.

There are going to be budget cuts all around as legislators work to trim the federal budget, and this is a new reality that has to be faced, she said. Oates urged career and technical educators to present her department with ideas about what areas can be cut without diluting the quality of programming, or reducing the numbers of people being served. Accord-

ing to Oates, in the end we'll need to get "more out of our lemons."

### **Congressional Staffers to CTE: Keep Being Part of the Dialogue**

Congressional staffers representing legislators from both sides of the aisle noted during a panel discussion March 7 that feedback from career and technical educators about programming is integral in informing legislators about the value of CTE, and why funding should not be decreased or eliminated. Kirtley Fischer, legislative assistant for Rep. James Langevin (D-RI), noted that Langevin actively goes into CTE schools to see students in action, and has become a champion for the field because he sees how it positively affects outcomes.

Langevin, co-chair of the Career and Technical Education Caucus, recently gathered leaders from business and

industry in his state to collaborate with educators, and work to find ways to close the skills gap. Fischer said that for this Congress it is imperative that CTE highlights the link between CTE and careers—in particular, 21st century skills and workforce development—so that legislators see the value in funding career education appropriately.

While Langevin is not alone on Capitol Hill in championing for CTE, cuts to Tech Prep were proposed nonetheless by both the Obama Administration and the H.R. 1 bill passed in the House. Katherine Haley, policy assistant to House Speaker Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), said that the Tech Prep funding cut proposal was due to a poor Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) rating, and what Boehner sees as a duplication of efforts. Haley said that this year there will be ongoing discussions about the value of

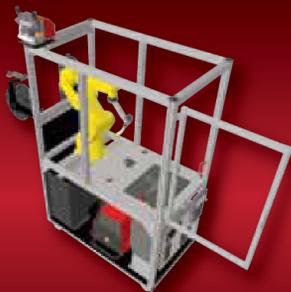
many programs, and feedback from CTE practitioners is key to inform legislators' decision-making on issues such as CTE funding, and also the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, when that reauthorization gets moving.

Helen J. Pajcic, aide to George Miller (D-CA) on the Education and the Workforce Committee, noted that the GOP and Democrats share a lot of the same concerns. This is a time of change, she said, and while proposed funding cuts to CTE programming is frustrating, it is a reflection of the budgetary climate on Capitol Hill; it may have to mean eliminating programs such as Tech Prep, or it may mean the collection of data to demonstrate results, she said. In the end, it will boil down to how legislators can address the challenges facing education to make fewer dollars go farther and function more effectively.

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## Panel of Experts Discusses the Issues Driving Legislation

No doubt one of the biggest issues on the minds of legislators on Capitol Hill and in the Obama Administration is job creation, said Donna Harris-Aikens, director of education policy and practice at the National Education Association, and CTE has a role to play in helping to turn things around. There is also a big focus to forge partnerships across education, she added, and this is being driven by the need to find solutions and increase productivity—on a budget.

“The silos are being broken down, some for the better, some for the worse,” she said.

Ross Weiner, executive director of the Education and Society Program at The Aspen Institute, said that a key issue at hand is: Is the United States ready to maintain its leadership, economically and otherwise, in the world? And there is concern whether CTE is ready to meet these challenges. He noted that one promising development is the adoption of the Council of Chief State School Officers’ Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by most states, which will serve to foster academics as well as literacy, reading and writing skills in the technical areas—and that will demand a real shift.

Teacher effectiveness is another issue that the CCSS will address by testing what students are learning, which will ultimately impact educators’ professional development and evaluations. It will also facilitate the development of communities of educators who will come together to collaborate, Weiner said.

The collection and use of data has been a problem for CTE and education overall, Weiner noted, because “everyone’s got their own measurements, and they’re not comparable.” But the CCSS will help move toward consistency across states in the collection and use of data to drive program improvement and students’ achievement.

Keith Krueger, CEO of the Consortium for School Networking, said that the United States faces a challenge of preparing students for a world of change. One word that has dominated education over the past decade is accountability. While accountability won’t go away anytime soon, a new word has been added to the lexicon, and that

word is innovation—finding ways, means and resources to fund programs that work in what is a dynamic and changing world. **T**

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