

WASHINGTON UPDATE

The U.S. Senate continues to work on what has become known as the “Jobs Bill,” although it’s not all business as usual. The core of the Jobs Bill is a package of tax cuts, hiring incentives, unemployment extensions, programs to help retain employees, offsets, and tax credit bond programs. The original draft was an \$85 billion package crafted over 4 months of bipartisan work in conjunction with the White House. So it was surprising when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) pulled that version at the last minute and introduced a stripped down \$15 billion version. Rumors swirl around his rationale for this, but only the Senator knows for sure why he did what he did.

One of the only similarities between the Senate draft and what Reid introduced last Thursday is a seemingly benign group of extensions to a handful of transportation-related measures. The Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) worked with the Senate to include the motorcycle safety program set up under SAFETEA-LU (PL 109-59) on the list of extended programs. The program sends cash back to the states to be used only for motorcycle rider education and public awareness campaigns aimed at motorists. Reid’s bill would continue the full funding of \$7 million a year for the next two years. For those who feel that federal funds come with strings attached, it’s important to remember that this started as state money. It was sent to DC to collect in a trust fund and then it is sent back to the states for specific programs.

“With the likelihood that the next highway bill will be stalled for the foreseeable future, it’s important that we keep funding these effective safety programs in the meantime,” said Jeff Hennie, Vice President of Government Relations and Public Affairs for the MRF. “Considering that most states are using their current state funds dedicated to running motorcycle safety programs on everything except motorcycle safety, it becomes apparent just how badly this money is needed,” he added.

The House passed similar motorcycle safety program legislation, but only extended the funding for one year. The reasoning by the House was that we cannot wait for two years to pass a full highway bill.

As always, the MRF will keep you updated on this and all other issues affecting motorcyclists.