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House Approves Aerospace Workforce Legislation

Arlington, Va. – The U.S. House of Representatives passed an AIA-supported bill to create a federal inter-agency task force on aerospace workforce revitalization Tuesday, a major step to addressing a looming critical shortage of engineers and other workers in the industry.

Reps. Vern Ehlers (R-Mich.) and Ellen Tauscher (D-Calif.) introduced the measure (HR 758) earlier this year, and it cleared the House by a unanimous vote.

The bill charges 11 executive branch agencies, including NASA and the Defense and Homeland Security departments, to identify new aerospace workforce opportunities through a variety of scholarship, training, and recruitment programs in partnership with the private sector and state governments.

Each year, the task force, under the leadership of the Labor Department, would report to Congress on the status of federal policies designed to advance human capital development in the areas of science, engineering, technology, and mathematics, as well as vocational trades.

“Aerospace industries make a unique contribution to the economic and national security of the United States as we pursue the global war on terrorism and expand our commercial export markets,” AIA President and CEO John Douglass said. “This legislation will galvanize the resources of the public and private sectors to expand science and engineering recruitment across the entire industry, ensuring that aerospace companies can rely on a steady stream of technically qualified professionals.”

In a recent report to the President, the bipartisan Commission on the Future of the United States Aerospace Industry recommended the establishment of multi-agency strategy panel to counter “the nation’s apathy toward developing a technologically trained workforce.” The Commission warned that this apathy could lead to “intellectual and industrial disarmament” and pose a “direct threat to our nation’s capability to continue as a world leader.”

The average American aerospace employee, however, is in his or her 50s, far older than the levels that prevail in other high-technology sectors .In 2008, 27 percent of aerospace workers will also become eligible for retirement.

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Founded in 1919, the Aerospace Industries Association represents the nation's leading manufacturers and suppliers of civil, military, and business aircraft, helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, space systems, aircraft engines, materiel, and related components, equipment services, and information technology.