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Senators Cantwell and Snowe Introduce Education Account Bill to Make American Workers More Competitive

Tax Credits for Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs)

Washington, DC—Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) are introducing a bill today to encourage employees to set aside money for their education costs, and encourage employers to provide matching funds through Lifelong Learning Accounts. Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs) are employer-matched, portable, individual savings accounts used to finance education and training – similar to a 401(k), but used for skill building and career advancement.

“Good jobs and long-term employability – that’s what every American worker needs, while America’s businesses, government agencies and other employers need educated, motivated workers. The Cantwell/Snowe bill is a win-win idea for America,” said Pamela Tate, President of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), which developed the Lifelong Learning Account model.

The Cantwell/Snowe Lifelong Learning Accounts Act, introduced today, would establish a demonstration that offers tax credits for employer and employee contributions to Lifelong Learning Accounts in up to ten states for up to 200,000 workers. The funds in these accounts would finance a wide range of educational activities. The tax credit targets taxpayers with low to moderate incomes.

“To make sure our country remains a leader in the global economy and stays at the forefront cutting-edge innovation, we need to give Americans more training opportunities for high-skill positions. Lifelong Learning Accounts help workers and employers boost the education of the American workforce, and keep our country competitive” said Senator Cantwell.

“The Lifelong Learning Accounts program will give millions of Americans an opportunity to develop the skills necessary to compete in an increasingly knowledge based economy,” explained Sen. Snowe. Creating savings accounts to finance education and training for career development will enable millions of hard working men and women to advance their careers and earnings.”

Ongoing LiLA demonstration projects by CAEL in Chicago, northeastern Indiana, San Francisco --in partnership with Jewish Vocational Service -- and by the state of Maine are helping employees at all levels get the training they need to succeed. ShoreBank in Chicago has been the financial institutional partner for CAEL's demonstration projects. These programs are demonstrating that LiLAs work and that they benefit employees and employers. Paul Kelvington, a participant in the Chicago demonstration site, set money aside for college while he waited tables. After eighteen years out of school, he is now earning a bachelor’s degree with the goal of working in the area of alcohol and drug counseling. “There are a lot of young kids out there that don’t have a positive role model in their lives,” he says. “I want to be that type of person and in order to impart wisdom I have to educate myself. I want to be able to help

people and point them in the right direction.” The LiLA program helped Mr. Kelvington reach his education goals affordably: “People should never stop learning. The LiLA program helps you financially and it won’t break the bank.”

As a married mother of 9-year-old twin boys, Becky Miller found saving for education difficult before the LiLA program. She was promoted from an assembler to an inspector at ITT Aerospace Industries in Fort Wayne, Indiana while participating in the Lifelong Learning Account demonstration. She says, “I never had the money to finish [my degree] until the Lifelong [Learning] Account program came around. When I found out I could finish my degree, I was thrilled!” Becky is now inspired to continue to save – this time for her retirement.

Fanni Munoz started taking English as a Second Language courses from City College of San Francisco as soon as she was accepted into the LiLA program. By improving her language skills, Fanni earned a promotion shortly after she began her classes. After observing Fanni’s improved work performance and her high motivation level for increasing her skills, Fanni’s supervisor nominated her for the Outstanding Employee Award at UCSF Medical Center. She has achieved two promotions in two and a half years. Currently, Fanni is pursuing her Human Resource Management Certificate at San Francisco State University, Extended Learning. “Thanks for LiLAs! Without the program, I would not be where I am right now. I can see many more career opportunities in front of me after I have completed the certificate. LiLAs is such a fantastic program that helps me advance my career!”

With Lifelong Learning Accounts, workers can upgrade their skills and knowledge to meet the needs of business and industry. For this reason, many employers support the program, especially those who cannot fund full tuition reimbursement programs. Like many health care providers, University of California San Francisco Medical Center and Campus (UCSF) is facing a large shortage of higher skilled healthcare workers like RNs and Lab Technicians. UCSF was very happy to partner with CAEL to offer LiLAs to help its workers get the education and training needed to advance in their careers. “We see LiLAs as a wonderful opportunity to recognize and reward our incumbent workers, while filling our own workforce needs at the same time,” said Jennifer Hermann, Director of Human Resources at UCSF Medical Center. “We truly believe from previous on-site training experience that if workers invest their own money in education, they are ten times more likely to follow through and be serious about completing their education. And that’s worth investing in as an employer.”

Many other groups have expressed their support for LiLAs.

Mike Langford, President of the Utility Workers Union of America, says, “Because we represent over 50,000 workers in the utilities industry, UWUA knows a quality workforce is critical to keeping our country’s utilities safe and efficient. By encouraging employer and employee co-investment, LiLAs offers workers a meaningful opportunity to get the education and training they need to advance in their careers and improve their skills and knowledge.”

Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President of the Council on Competitiveness explains, “The Council on Competitiveness is the only group of corporate CEOs, university presidents, and labor leaders committed to driving U.S. competitiveness in global markets and ensuring the future prosperity of all Americans through the creation of high-value economic activity. Investing in Lifelong Learning

Accounts will help ensure the prosperity of Americans by enhancing their ability to compete and thrive as part of the global workforce.”

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) is a national non-profit leader in the fields of adult learning and workforce development, providing colleges and universities, companies, labor organizations and state and local governments with the tools and strategies they need for creating practical, effective lifelong learning solutions. CAEL is headquartered in Chicago and also maintains offices in Denver, Philadelphia, Norwalk, CT, and New York City. For more information go to: www.CAEL.org

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