



ACCT, Advocacy, and the Stimulus Package

by Jee Hang Lee

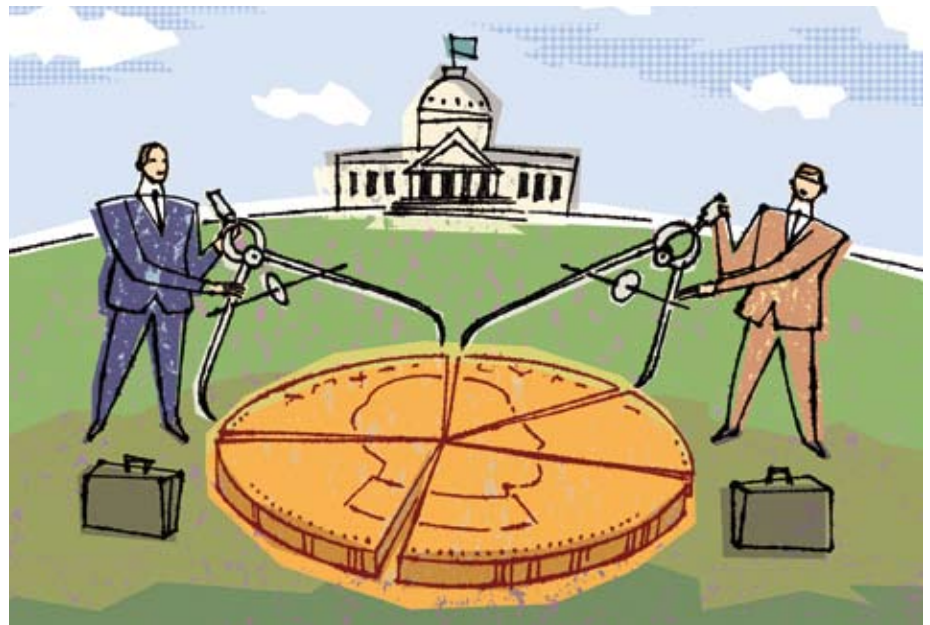
WHEN PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA signed into law H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, it represented an historic infusion of funds to the nation's community colleges, which diligently work to bring economic stability to their communities and students. The signing of this \$787 billion legislation was the culmination of a major organizational and grassroots effort by ACCT and other community college supporters to bring lawmakers' attention to the work done by community colleges in helping the local, state, and national economy.

In the months leading up to the presidential election, the political discourse was centered on whether a stimulus package was necessary to help the ailing economy. Congress and the Administration put off discussion of a stimulus package until after the election because any action would have been seen as altering or affecting the outcome.

After the election, then President-elect Barack Obama and Congressional leaders coalesced around a goal of working on a stimulus bill that would jumpstart the weakening economy. Since December 2007, the U.S. economy has lost over 3 million jobs, with the bulk of the losses coming in the last several months.

As the discussion of a potential stimulus bill intensified last year, ACCT queried a number of community college and association leaders to determine what type of aid was most needed. In formulating a set of priorities, ACCT concentrated on three key issues that had been identified by community college leaders:

- The Pell Grant program;
- community college infrastructure, and
- job-training programs.



These areas were targeted based upon a number of factors, including swelling enrollments, declining state funding, the rise in unemployment, and the worsening financial situation for students.

Pell Grants: Since the beginning of the 2008 academic year, the Pell Grant program has seen a major increase in the number of applications, followed by a corresponding increase in recipients. While research has shown that college attendance increases in tough economic times, the rise in Pell Grant applications and recipients surpassed most expectations. The Department of Education noted that the largest percentage increases in applicants were among individuals between 24 and 35 and those 35 and up.

Recent statutory changes have also increased eligibility for the program. Together, the increasing applications and statutory changes placed a

considerable financial strain on the program, which had a significant shortfall. The stimulus package provided an opportunity to address the shortfall and allocate additional funds for the neediest students.

Community College Infrastructure: Ever since the 2008 report by the National Commission on Community Colleges, *Winning The Skills Race and Strengthening America's Middle Class*, there has been an increased focus on meeting the infrastructure needs of the largest sector of higher education. Specifically, the report recommended federal support for facilities construction and stressed that modernization is crucial for community colleges. Working with others concerned about this issue, ACCT queried a number of state associations to gauge infrastructure needs. It became readily apparent that this was a significant issue for community colleges — especially those

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Since 2008, over 500 new people have signed up to receive ACCT's LAW Alert e-mails — brief summaries of legislative actions e-mailed to subscribers as legislation happens, giving community college trustees, presidents and other leaders and advocates time to contact their representatives and exert influence before it's too late.

Please encourage your fellow trustees, presidents and colleagues to stay up to date about legislation that affects their community colleges by joining the LAW E-Alert network. To join, simply e-mail publicpolicy@acct.org with "LAW Alert" in the subject of the e-mail.

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with burgeoning enrollments. In its analysis, ACCT estimated that there are \$100 billion in unmet infrastructure and capital costs nationwide.

Job-Training Programs: In the forefront of providing training for high-skill and high-demand positions, community colleges are being called upon to help local communities deal with rising unemployment rates. As



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local economies change, federal funds are critical in providing seed dollars to ensure that 21st-century jobs are created in a variety of growing industries.

After submitting its stimulus proposal, ACCT followed up by meeting with President-elect Obama's transition team. We issued Latest Action in Washington (LAW) E-Alert updates — often daily — to keep members current on all stimulus legislation that stood to affect community colleges, especially in these three critical priority areas. These e-mail updates, which are archived online at www.acct.org/advocacy/latest, enabled trustees and other community college leaders to maintain informed communication with their Congressional

representatives, bolstering federal-level advocacy on behalf of community colleges. All this advocacy work yielded the greatest national support of community colleges in history through the pro-community college legislation contained in H.R. 1.

ACCT's public policy department is proud to have been involved in this monumental accomplishment, and we thank our member trustees, presidents, and colleges for doing their part to remain active and involved throughout the stimulus legislation process, from supporting our original meetings to calling, writing letters, and meeting with Congressional representatives during the 2009 National Legislative Summit.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 is evidence of your college's support of ACCT. Keep an eye out for advocacy-themed sessions at the 2009 ACCT Leadership Congress in San Francisco, and be sure to order a copy of ACCT's newest publication on advocacy, due out this spring. For more information, go to www.acct.org/resources/publications/bookstore.php. And if you have not already done so, be sure to sign up for the Latest Action in Washington E-Alert by e-mailing publicpolicy@acct.org with "LAW Alert" in the subject line. We look forward to working on behalf of community colleges in the coming years to earn greater federal support for our programs and services.



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