

RSVA LEGISLATIVE REPORT

By: Ron Eller, RSVA Legislative Chair, GA

The U.S. House Surface Transportation Infrastructure Committee is expected to mark up a Bill, which could affect over 1000 blind Randolph-Sheppard vendors currently operating highway Rest Areas across our nation. On the Senate side, a bill titled the Surface Transportation Act, S.158.IS is also being prepared.

As we know, the Kennelly Amendments give Randolph-Sheppard vendors priority on the Federal Highway system, to provide vending services in Rest Areas. The Kennelly Amendments presently sit inside of the current Surface Transportation Act, but may be eliminated in the new "Reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act of 2011", which is being updated on both sides of Congress.

The House Committee is expected to write in the new Bill language that would allow individual states commercialization of their rest areas. Sean Whalen of Linchpin Strategies, a consulting company with whom NCSAB contracts, recently reported that a potential threat to highway vending from private commercialization efforts may soon come to pass in the Reauthorization Act, and vendors and SLA's alike should watch for future reports from NCSAB concerning this issue. If your elected House representative serves on this Committee, please call their office and let them know that almost one-third of all Randolph-Sheppard locations are highway Rest Areas, and this could highly impact the livelihoods of blind vendors.

Another bill recently introduced in the Senate (S.679) "The Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act of 2011", sponsored by Sen. Schumer, N.Y. with 15 other co-sponsor senators, will affect the "political power" of the Randolph-Sheppard Program. The RSA Commissioner position has always been a Presidential Appointment with Senate approval, which basically means "political power" for that appointed position. With the proposed legislation, that position will become a Department of Education standard "Directorship", and the political standing will fold

under the Department of Education. Please contact your elected state officials and request that they not support this bill, as this may remove the RSA Commissioner from that position.

Senate Bill 1036 was introduced to the Senate Committee on May 19, 2011 by Sen. Ben Cardin and Co-sponsor, Sen. David Vitter, LA. The Bill's Title is "The AbilityOne Improvement Act", and is written to amend Title 40 of the U.S. Code, to ensure that job opportunities for people who are blind and people with significant disabilities are met by requiring the application of JWOD to certain lease agreements entered into by the federal government for private buildings or improvements.

Several States/Cities have been introducing legislation for "healthy vending and food services in government facilities". California has introduced AB 727 which will require 50% healthy vending in all machines and facilities by 2014 and 100% healthy vending in all vending machines and food service facilities by 2016. California vendors have been testifying at the Hearings against this legislation. Alabama has recently been served with similar legislation, and their BEP will be reporting on their pilot project for nutritional sales in the near future.

Seattle, Washington has recently passed guidelines to encourage healthy vending sales by various organizations for government worksites, youth activities, and community settings. With its "Healthy Incentives" program, there are working with a 20% guideline.

The State of Florida's Vending Organizations recently battled victoriously a 6% sales tax hike for bottled water. Their NAMA membership united and sent in over 300 emails demanding defeat of this bill. Remember, elected officials must listen and R-S vendors do have a voice through RSVA!

As a matter of interest, the Presidential dollar gold coins are becoming a success for the vending industry. The President Grant coin was just released on May 19, 2011.