

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

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The “Gang of Six”: Reaching a Budget Deal

If you’ve been watching the budget debate out of Washington, D.C., you’re aware that partisanship and very distinct ideological positions are going to be major parts of the discussion as we debate extending the federal debt ceiling and then try to adopt a budget for FY 2012.

A unique group of U.S. Senators has been meeting since the beginning of the year, trying to hammer out a compromise position that incorporates findings and recommendations from the President’s Debt Commission.

Dubbed the “Gang of Six”, the South is well represented in this bi-partisan group. Of the six members, three are from SECA states. The

group’s members include:

- Senator Kent Conrad (D-North Dakota)
- Senator Richard Durbin (D-Illinois)
- **Senator Tom Coburn** (R-Oklahoma)
- Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho)
- **Senator Mark Warner** (D-Virginia)
- **Senator Saxby Chambliss** (R-Georgia)

Another SECA state Senator, **Jeff Sessions (R-Georgia)** serves as the ranking Republican on the Senate Budget Committee. He is the Republican counterpart to Senator Conrad (D-ND), the chair of the Committee.



Senator
Coburn



Senator Warner

Senator Chambliss

Senator

Sessions has expressed his concern that it’s time for the group to decide whether a compromise is obtainable. “I think it’s time for the Gang of Six to see if they can produce something.” *Source: Time for “Gang of Six” to Determine If Spending Deal Within Grasp, DOW JONES NEWSWIRES, 4/12/2011.*

A Final Federal Budget for FY 2011

Congress dodged another bullet on April 8th by agreeing to a one week continuing resolution to draft a FY 2011 budget compromise that was reached at the midnight hour. Budget discussions continued until almost midnight on Friday, April 8th, and additional cuts were agreed to in order to keep the government

from shutting down. Congressional staffers spent the weekend putting together the compromise legislation that will finalize the FY 2011 budget.

The proposed FY 2011 budget includes early childhood funding to replace funding that will disappear when ARRA funding stops. This includes

replacement funding for Head Start and Early Head Start and a small increase in the Child Care & Development Block Grant. The budget will also allow a portion of the \$700 million Race to the Top grants to be utilized for early childhood systems, similar to the proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund. *Source: www.nwlc.org*

The Path to Prosperity

On Tuesday, April 5, 2011, the Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Budget Committee, Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin issued a FY 2012 budget resolution, *The Path to Prosperity: Restoring America’s Promise.*

This budget resolution contains significant budget cuts as well as changes to entitlements such as Medicare and Medicaid. It is designed to provide a blueprint to reduce the federal budget deficit by FY 2040.

For a summary of the proposal, go to page 4 of this newsletter.

For More Details on the FY 2011 Budget

Compromise

Go to Page 3 of this Newsletter

You’ll find information about specific funding levels and cuts to programs for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year.

Reporting on Teacher Prep Programs

In 2008, the Higher Education Act reauthorization included a provision in Title II that outlined numerous data collection requirements. These new requirements were essentially “tweaks” on the current reporting system.

Generally, both preparation programs and states are now required to produce “report cards” on teacher preparation. These report cards include among other things:

1. The average scores on licensing exams.
2. The length and supervision of

student-teaching requirements.

3. The integration of technology in teacher preparation.
4. State and program progress in preparing teachers in high-need subjects.

Data collection is scheduled to end in October and the first national report is expected to be released early in 2012.

Concerns among deans of education have surfaced about the utility of this enhanced reporting and the compar-

bility of data among states.

“We’ve had to sit down and say, “This is how we’ll define it. Let’s make sure to do it like that every year,” according to Randy A. Hitz, the dean of the School of Education at Portland State University in Oregon. “Then you must multiply that process by 1200 programs, and you end up with a mess....I don’t have much faith that it will provide the U.S. Secretary of Education with what he wants.”

Source: *Colleges Play Catch-Up with HEA*, *Education Week*, 3/9/2011

Another Children’s Victory in Virginia

The Virginia General Assembly adjourned with victories for children’s programs. (See *Public Policy Notes*, April 2011, page 6, for information on the legislative outcomes.)

In spite of the refusal of the General Assembly to enact some of the Governor’s proposals, Governor McDonnell offered several budget amendments in the March General Assembly veto session that would significantly impact

children’s programs. Governor McDonnell again proposed to reclassify therapeutic foster care (CSA) as a residential service, cutting \$7.5 million out of the budget. He also asked to over-

“You got results: the Governor’s proposed cuts to CSA, Healthy Families and CHIP were overwhelmingly rejected.” *Voices for Virginia’s Children, 4/12/2011*

turn the \$500,000 partial funding restorations for Healthy Families and CHIP of Virginia.

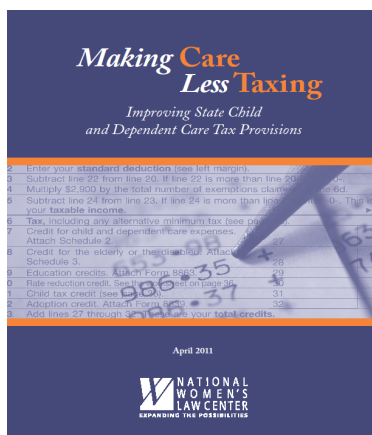
The cuts were rejected a second time.



Governor McDonnell

Developing Good Tax Policies to Support Families

The National Women’s Law Center (NWLC) released on April 12, 2011 an update of their 2006 report, *Making Care Less Taxing: Improving State Child and Dependent Care Tax Provisions*. This 2011 version includes



the 34 child and dependent care provisions in effect in 28 states in tax year 2010.

The report lists four reasons for states to institute dependent care credits:

1. Assistance for families with large employment expenses.

2. Equitable income tax treatment of families.
3. Support for higher quality care.
4. Equity for women.

The report is designed to assist policy-makers and advocates to develop the best child and dependent care tax provisions for their states.

For a copy of the report, go to www.nwlc.org.

The Final FY 2011 Budget: Get the Specifics

The final budget continuing resolution was agreed to last week and details were released on April 12, 2011. The House and Senate passed the resolution and forwarded it to the White House on Thursday, April 14, 2011. A summary of the Continuing Resolution (CR) was provided by the House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

OVERALL SPENDING LIMIT: The total funding for FY 2011 is \$1.049 trillion. This total includes nearly \$40 billion in reductions from last year's funding levels. (This total includes the \$12 billion approved in previous continuing resolutions, including the defunding of several early childhood literacy programs such as Even Start.)

AGRICULTURE: Total funding: \$20 billion which reflects a decrease of \$3 billion from last year's levels. It maintains funding for Food Safety and Inspection but decreases that appropriation by \$10 million below last year.

The CR also includes \$6.75 billion for the Special Supplemental Feeding Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). This level will support more than 9 million low income mothers, infants and children up to 5 years of age.

DEFENSE: The Department of Defense received an increase of approximately \$5 billion from last year. This will fund continuing overseas military operations and ensure that military families receive adequate support services.

HOMELAND SECURITY: The Department's appropriation was cut by 2% from last year's funding level. Some of that decrease comes from reductions in Border Security Fencing, FEMA first responder grants, elimination of earmarks and rescission of unobligated and lapsed balances from prior year funds. The bill caps the amount of TSA screener personnel at 46,000.

INTERIOR: Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for Humanities is reduced by \$25 million from last year.

LABOR, HHS, EDUCATION and RELATED AGENCIES: These agencies see a 3.36% reduction from last year's levels. Funding for large education programs that fund elementary and secondary schools as well as special education is preserved. Head Start receives a modest increase, as does the Child Care & Development Block Grant. The Pell Grant Program is continued at the current level of \$4,860, although the bill eliminates the option for students to receive more than one Pell Grant at the same time.

The bill eliminates two programs under the new health care law: the Consumer Operated and Oriented Plan (forming health co-ops in states) and the Free Choice Voucher Program (employer vouchers for employees who choose to leave an employer sponsored health plan to go to the new state insurance exchanges).

Title X funding (family planning) is returned to FY 2008 levels.

Americorps funding was maintained.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH: Appropriations are reduced by \$103 million. Funding for the U.S. House is reduced by \$55 million.

For a copy of the bill or summaries go to:

<http://appropriations.house.gov>

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

You'll find different "takes" on the final compromise...Republican in the House, Democrat in the Senate

How Does Your State Rank? Dependent Care Tax Credits

The National Women's Law Center (NWLC) issued a report, *Making the Grade for Care* on April 14, 2011.

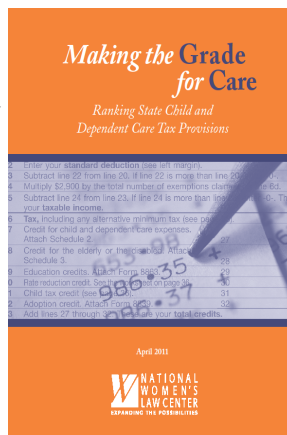
The report found that families in 28 states in 2011 were eligible for state tax assistance in meeting the costs of child and dependent care. Since 2005, two states passed new tax provisions and a few improved existing tax provisions.

This "report card" ranks 28 states for their tax provisions and another 14

states that assess personal income taxes but have no child or dependent care tax provision. The report did not grade 9 states with no state income tax.

Ranks for SECA states:

- B+** Louisiana (school readiness credit)
- B-** Arkansas (early child-



hood program credit)

- C+** North Carolina
- C** Arkansas (cc credit), Kentucky, Oklahoma, South Carolina
- D** Virginia
- F** Alabama, Mississippi, West Virginia

Go to www.nwlc.org for a copy of the report.

Why Race and Place Matter

PolicyLink, a national research and action institute, released a new report, *Why Place & Race Matter*, on April 14, 2011. The report focuses on the issue of how policies at the state and federal level can impact the health of communities, particularly minority communities. It also includes strategies and recommendations about designing policies that impact health positively by the consideration of demographic statistics in the



development of those policies. The authors recognize that “neighborhood environmental factors—from economic opportunities to the physical environment to social connections among neighbors to supportive services—profoundly influence the health of residents.” This report delves into the research about why “place and race

matter” and provides examples of exemplary community initiatives that have been implemented throughout the country.

Although the report focuses on California locales, there are many case studies that can provide examples for your community. Many of the case studies look at collaboration between community entities and groups and focus on the use of shared facilities and resources.

For a copy of the report, go to www.policylink.org.

White House Launches “Joining Forces”

The White House launched **Joining Forces** on April 12, 2011, a national initiative to support and honor our military families.

Joining Forces “aims to educate, challenge and spark action from all sectors of our society—citizens, communities, businesses, non-profits, faith based institutions, philanthropic organizations and government—to ensure military

families have the support they have earned.” For more information go to www.JoiningForces.gov

“All Americans should know that one act of kindness extended to a family of a soldier, a sailor or Marine, a Coast Guardsman, reverberates across water, over the mountains, and through the deserts, into the heart of the warrior who is standing alone.” Vice-President Biden



President Obama, Vice-President Biden, Dr. Jill Biden and First Lady Michelle Obama Launch *Joining Forces*

Shared Curriculum Guidelines

On March 7, 2011, a group of seventy-five (75) distinguished educators from across America issued **A Call for Common Content**. This call to action was designed to support the development of shared curriculum guidelines for the new common core standards that have been adopted by almost all states. (See *Public Policy Notes*, June 2010, for information about the Common Core Standards.)

The group was brought together by the

Albert Shanker Institute, a Washington think tank named for the late President of the American Federation of Teachers.

According to the document, “We caution that attaining the goals provided by these standards requires a clear road map in the form of rich, common curriculum content, along with resources to support successfully teaching all students to mastery. Shared curriculum in the core academic subjects would give shape and

substance to the standards.”

The group emphasized that they were “not advocating for one prescriptive learning plan for all children but one or more curricular guides to help translate the common standards in mathematics and English/language arts into sound curriculum and accompanying resources.”

To access a copy of the document and see a list of signatories, go to www.ashankerinst.org/curriculum.html

Florida's Early Learning Program: Who Will Manage It?

On Friday, April 1, 2011, proposals to trim the Medicaid budget and consolidate some state agencies was passed out of the Florida Senate Budget Committee.

The **Medicaid proposal** would save \$300 million in funds (\$200 million state, \$100 million) by eliminating the state's Medically Needy program. This program is designed for individuals who are otherwise ineligible for Medicaid, but because of severe medical conditions, are financially burdened with medical expenses.

The second proposal will merge the

Florida Department of Community Affairs and the Agency for Workforce Innovation into one "Jobs Florida" agency. Additionally the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development would go under the direct supervision of the Governor.

One interesting twist to the agency mergers has to do with Florida's Early Learning Program. Currently the program is operated under the aegis of the Agency for Workforce Innovation. The contemplated merger has initiated a discussion about where the program will be housed in the future.

Under the proposal, the program would move to the Florida Department of Education.

Senator Stephen Wise (R-Jacksonville) offered an amendment to move the program to the Department of Children and Families. The amendment did not pass.

The two bills have just begun the journey and must get through both chambers of the Florida legislature to become law.

Source: *www.sunshinestatenews.com*, April 2, 2011.

West Virginia: Laws from the 2011 Session

The West Virginia Legislature passed several initiatives that may be of interest to SECA members. These bills will become law in June 2011.

- **Senate Bill 35** increased the tax credit for adoption to \$4,000 per child. This credit is available to families who are not related to the child and are designed as a support to cover the costs of bringing that child into a family.
- **Senate Bill 538** created the Learn and Earn Cooperative Education

Program to ensure that students who are attending college and must work full time have the opportunity to do so.

- **Senate Bill 592** requires that all schools have written crisis response plans and outlines the criteria for

those plans.

- **House Bill 2550** adopts the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. This compact is designed to ensure that military children who move from locale to locale face no disruption in their education.
- **House Bill 3116** requires schools to create curriculum teams and local school collaborative processes.

For the full text of the enrolled bills, go to

http://www.legis.state.wv.us/Bill_Status/bills_history.cfm?year=2011&sessiontype=RS

Memphis Votes to Merge Schools

A March 8, 2011 referendum in the city of Memphis, Tennessee resulted in a vote to merge the school districts of Memphis and the much smaller suburban district of Shelby County. With passage of the initiative, the Memphis School District would turn over its charter to the Shelby County Commission. This Commission would be responsible for facilitating the merger with the Shelby County District. With

the proposed merger, the school district would become one of the 20 largest in the nation with over 105,000 students.

The Memphis School District has been plagued by funding problems and low scores on mandatory tests.

In response to the proposed merger, Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam signed legislation in February 2011 that would delay any attempt by the Mem-

phis School Board to turn over its state charter. This law requires a formal transition plan that would delay a merger for three years.

A lawsuit has been filed by Shelby County Schools asking the courts to clarify how the transition and merger of the two school boards will occur.

Sources: *Education Week*, February 23, 2011 & March 16, 2011

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Southern Early Childhood Association



"A Voice for Southern Children"

We're on the Web!
www.southernearlychildhood.org

How to Use This Newsletter

If you're interested in advocacy, one of the most effective tools that you can have is access to information. This newsletter is provided as a service to locate and share information that we think will be helpful to you in your work at the state level and to keep you updated on what's happening in public policy.

You'll find information that:

- **Compares your state to other SECA states**—how you're doing, what issues you have in common, what the hot topics are in your states.
- **Brings the national scene to your fingertips** and gives you a perspective on how national events might impact you...You'll also receive information about where to find additional information.

We hope you'll find it helpful. Children need you to be their "voice" in your community and state.

The Path to Prosperity: The Republican Budget Plan

On April 5, 2011, Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, chair of the House Committee on the Budget, submitted a proposed blueprint for the federal budget. This blueprint was designed to streamline and change the federal budget to bring federal spending and deficits under control and contained many of the items that were recommended by the President's Debt Commission. The key objectives of the proposal are:

- **ECONOMIC GROWTH & JOB CREATION**
- **SPENDING CUTS & CONTROLS**
- **RETIREMENT SECURITY**
- **PATIENT-CENTERED HEALTH CARE**
- **RESTORING AMERICA'S EXCEPTIONAL PROMISE**

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN

Efficient, Effective and Responsible Government

1. Prioritizing national security.
2. Streamlining government agencies, **including returning discretionary spending to below FY 2008 levels and repealing the new health care law.**
3. Ending corporate welfare.
4. Boosting American energy resources.
5. Locking in savings with enforceable spending caps and budget-reform processes.

Strengthening the Social Safety Net

1. Repairing the Medicaid system.
2. Preparing the workforce for a 21st century economy.

Fulfilling the Mission of Health and Retirement Security

- Saving Medicare.
- Advancing Social Security solutions.

Promoting Economic Growth and Job Creation

- Individual tax reform.
- Corporate tax reform.

The proposed plan contains significant reductions in current spending levels in most programs and has met with resistance from Democrats and other groups. The plan is expected to pass the House but meet resistance in the Senate. We'll keep you posted as the debate heats up.

Source: *The Path to Prosperity*, <http://www.gop.gov/budget>