

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

Highlights from the State of the Union 2014

February 2014

Volume 7, Issue 2



The initiatives proposed by the President that can be enacted by Executive Order include:

On Tuesday, January 29, 2014, President Barack Obama delivered the 2014 State of the Union Address. This address is the President's annual opportunity to update the citizens of the country on the "state of the union" and to unveil his policy priorities for the upcoming year.

The President took this opportunity to announce new policy initiatives and to state his intent to implement many of these policies by executive order. This approach is designed to move an agenda forward without Congressional action. According to the President's aides, this approach signals the President's willingness to "make progress despite a lack of cooperation on Capitol Hill."

- ◆ The creation of a retirement savings program for lower-income workers. The plan would be made available to workers without an employer sponsored 401(k) or pension.
- ◆ An increase in the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour for workers hired by firms with federal contracts.
- ◆ The protection of environmentally sensitive lands from development for energy production.
- ◆ The creation of partnerships with major technology and communications companies to give access to broadband and wireless technology to 15,000 schools.

The proposals that will require Congressional action include:

- ◆ An increase in the earned income tax credit for workers without children and expansion of availability to more workers.
- ◆ An increase in the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour.
- ◆ Renewal of the expired extended unemployment benefits for persons without jobs for more than 26 weeks.
- ◆ A new tax credit to promote the production of the next generation of "clean cars".
- ◆ New incentives to encourage the use of trucks that run on alternative fuels.

Source: Obama's proposals, AR Democrat Gazette, 1/29/14, p 4A

Inside this issue:

<i>What Happened to Food Stamps?</i>	2
<i>Arkansas Medicaid Expansion: Still Fighting</i>	2
<i>Healthy Start</i>	3
<i>The #1 Question</i>	3
<i>State & Federal Updates</i>	4

Would you like to know more?

The White House has created a website that is dedicated to the 2014 State of the Union Address and contains more detailed information about the President's initiatives. You will find it located at

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sotu>

Disclosure: It is a "call to action" site and contains a sign-up feature that asks for support.

The Farm Bill: What Happened to Food Stamps?

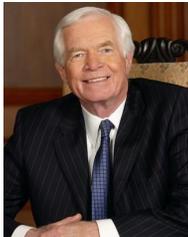
On Tuesday, February 4, 2014, Congress passed the reauthorization of the Farm Bill, a conglomeration of subsidies and supports for the agricultural industry and the “host” of the food stamp program.

The passage of the bill ended two years of partisan bickering to present a unified, bi-partisan bill that was developed through the leadership of four principal negotiators that included two SECA states:



Above: Lucas
Right: Cochran

Representative Frank Lucas (R-OK) and Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS).



Representative Collin Peterson (D-MN) and Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) were the other two principal negotiators..

The bill enacted cuts of approximately \$9 billion over 10 years to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) or Food Stamp program through measures that were designed to reduce food stamp fraud. This was twice the amount of cuts sought by Democrats in the Senate version of the farm bill but less than the \$40 billion in cuts in the original bill passed by the House.

The major cut was achieved through a provision that would require households in some states to receive more than \$20 in federal heating assistance in order to receive enhanced food stamp benefits. 17 states currently allow recipients who receive any type of assistance from

the federal Home Energy Assistance Program to receive enhanced benefits.

In the preliminary discussions prior to passage of the bill, **Every Child Matters** released concerns about the cuts:

- 1) With the expiration of the Recovery Act, benefits had already been cut.
- 2) The families cut the most will be those living in states with the highest energy costs...more support goes for heat and food in those states.

A positive note: Greater support was included for recipients that will shop at local farmers' markets and for improved SNAP education and training programs. *Sources: Congress approves 5-year farm bill, David Rogers, Politico, 2/4/14, <http://www.politico.com>; Every Child Matters, e-mail, 1-29-14*

The Arkansas Medicaid Expansion: They're Fighting It Out!

Last month, we reported that the **Private Option**, as the Arkansas Medicaid Expansion is called, was going to face a rough road as the Arkansas Legislature convened in February 2014 for the state's Fiscal Session.

The concept of the Private Option was to create a two-tiered program:

- ◆ Individuals who exhibited the most need and qualified would be placed in the traditional Medicaid program.
- ◆ Individuals who qualified but were not as unhealthy or needy were placed in a program that

routed them to a private insurance plan through traditional health insurance companies with premiums paid by the state. Federal funds were utilized to pay those premiums.

The battle is on and the House of Representatives has failed to pass a reauthorization of the program four times, with the last vote conducted on February 21st.

The Arkansas Senate, that had been waiting for House action, moved ahead on the 20th and passed the bill with a vote of 27-8. The supermajority needed (75%) was achieved

only through the change of a “no” vote based on the commitment to create a statewide workforce training program.

House Speaker Davy Carter said the House will vote again when it next convenes at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, February 25.

"We're going to get this issue resolved," he said. "There's no question to that. There are 100,000+ people out there that are literally hanging on what we do up here. This is serious business."

Source: Arkansas Online, <http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/>

The Healthy Start Initiative: Fighting Infant Mortality in Memphis

The United States ranks 30th in the world among industrialized nations for infant mortality and, according to the website of the Shelby County Tennessee Health Department, Memphis and the surrounding county have an infant mortality rate over 1.5 times the national rate.

In 2003, Shelby County ranked the worst in the nation in infant mortality for counties with over 12,000 births. That began a campaign that brought the Shelby County Health Department to the front lines to try to reduce that rate.

During the years since, they have instituted a **Healthy Start Initiative**, one of 103 federally-funded projects, that promotes “community-based maternal and child health home visitation programs, specifically focusing on reducing racial disparities in perinatal outcomes, such as low birth

weight, prematurity and infant death.”

Until 2012, the trend was promising with the years 2010 and 2011 showing declines in the infant mortality rate. (The rate in 2011 was 9.6, a decline from 15 babies per 1000 live births reported by the county in 2000.) In 2012, it ticked up to 10.6 per 1000 live births, a discouraging trend.

The Health Department has enlisted a variety of community partners (churches, schools, social workers, businesses, and local hospitals) in the campaign to improve the “social determinants” of health. These include education, income and living conditions. They are also working to improve prenatal care, nutrition and stress management for expectant mothers.

The most recent addition to the campaign is the **B4BabyLife mobile app campaign**, which features pre-



Healthy Start

Shelby County Health Department

natal information, safe sleep information, access to local resources, ways for fathers to help, information on family planning and information on staying healthy before and between pregnancies. For more information on the **B4BabyLife app** campaign, contact Elizabeth Hart at 901-222-9607 (office) or 901-500-5227 (mobile).

Sources: Health Department Launches First Mobile App, 12/4/13, www.shelbycountyttn.gov; Fighting infant mortality still tough in Memphis, <http://www.sfgate.com>, 2/19/14

The #1 Question: Is it good for children?

The **Legislative Action Team for Children and Families** has formed in West Virginia to advocate for positive programs for children and families and to fight proposals that have a negative effect. This coalition of over 20 organizations is closely monitoring and working on the policy front to impact legislation in the current West Virginia Legislative session.

Their website currently lists a series of budget cuts in Governor

Tomblin’s budget as the target for action.

- 8.5% cuts to Family Resource Networks and Starting Points Family Resource Centers.
- 25% cuts to In-Home Family Education Home-visiting programs.
- 26% cuts to child abuse prevention funds through the

WV Children’s Trust Fund.

- 14% cuts to domestic violence shelters.
- 7.4% cuts to Child Advocacy Centers that serve sexual abuse victims.

For more information go to www.number1question.org. You can also contact Jim McKay at info@number1question.org.

Legislative
Action Team for
Children & Families



Southern Early Childhood Association

1123 S. University, Suite 255
Little Rock, AR 72204
Little Rock, AR 72215-5930

Phone: 800-305-SECA

Fax: 501-227-5297

E-mail:

info@southernearlychildhood.org

www.southernearlychildhood.org

Southern Early Childhood Association



"A Voice for Southern Children"

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.

This monthly newsletter is produced by Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director.

SECA strives to provide non-partisan and non-biased information

that is of interest to early childhood educators. Sign up at

http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/policy_newsletter_sign.php

to receive notice of its availability each month.

Federal & State Updates

North Carolina Eliminates the Child & Dependent Care Credit (CADC)

Taxpayers in North Carolina will face an increased tax bill in 2014. They will no longer be able to deduct up to \$780 in a state CADC. The credit is still available for tax year 2013.



Florida's New Lieutenant Governor

Governor Rick Scott appointed former legislator Carlos López –

Cantera as Florida's Lieutenant Governor after the office had been vacant for 10 months. He

is the 19th Lieutenant Governor of the State of Florida and the first Hispanic to hold the office.

U.S. House and Senate Hold Early Learning Hearings

The Education & the Workforce Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives held a hearing on *The Foundation for Success: Discussing Early Childhood Education & Care in America*. You may access a video of the hearing at http://edworkforcehouse.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?clip_id=230.

Persons testifying at the hearing were Elena Yaslow, Knowledge Universe Early Learning Programs; Harriet Dichter, Delaware Office of Early Learning; and Russ Whitehurst, Brookings Institute.

On February 6th, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions held a hearing entitled, *Supporting Children & Families through Investments in High-Quality Early Education*. You may access a video of that hearing at <http://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/?id=e5fb765e-5056-a032-52c8-f2185f378db1>

Persons testifying at that hearing were: Hiro Yoshikawa, New York University; Charlotte Brantley, Clayton Early Learning in Colorado; **John White, Louisiana Department of Education**; and Danielle Ewen, DC Public Schools Preschool Program. PDF's of their testimony are available with the video.