

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

A New Year & A New Congress....And We Mean New!

With the mid-term election results in and a new year just beginning, we're experiencing something of a sea change in the make-up of our Congress.

It's not news that Republicans now control majorities in both the House and Senate. What is news is that the in-coming members of both chambers don't fit the profile that has existed for much of our nation's history.

This new group hasn't spent time working up through the ranks, starting in local and state elected offices and then moving to the national scene. They haven't spent time in one of the chambers, paying their dues, and moving into leadership positions after a period of service.

In the Senate, 13 new members will join 33 others that have served less than one six-year term. In the House, roughly one-half of all the lawmakers have been in office only since the 2008 election.

According to Paul Light of

New York University, "The era of the resume candidate is pretty much over." At the end of 2014, we've seen the retirement of "fixtures" in the Congress such as Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia and Representative George Miller of California, both staunch advocates for children.

The in-coming group is chronologically a little younger than previous groups; however, their age may not be the major factor. This election cycle was the fourth that saw an anti-incumbent swing and this means that the backgrounds and political experience of the newly elected Congressional representatives may have more influence than their chronological age.

The "experience" pipeline that has existed, from the U.S. House to U.S. Senate, has also been disrupted, with only one in-coming Senate freshman,

Shelly Moore Capito of West Virginia, having served a long career in the House.



Cotton



Daines

In-coming **Senators Tom Cotton of Arkansas** and **Steve Daines of Montana** served only one term in the House before being elected to the Senate. Will this lack of longevity within the system lead to a reform of institutions or will these new mem-



Capito

bers integrate themselves into existing traditions? It's sure to be a drama worth watching!
Source: *Young Outsiders Remake Pedigree of Congress*, Wall Street Journal, 1/6/15.

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CQ Roll Call

Are you a true political junkie? If so, you may wish to investigate the website of CQ Roll Call. It's an up-to-the minute source of news from Capitol Hill, reporting on everything from politics to legislation to policymakers. They "help you track and understand the people, the politics and the process—and how these forces affect your interests."

www.rollcall.com

The Fight for House Leadership

As the new year unfolds, House Speaker John Boehner has been re-elected for his third term as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. The election didn't take place without controversy and 3 Southerners challenged the Speaker.



Representatives Daniel Webster of Florida, Louie Gohmert of Texas and Ted Yoho of Florida

submitted their names for

consideration for the post.

In the most “defections” in many decades from the majority party, 25 Republicans voted for someone other than incumbent Speaker Boehner. **Of the 25, 14 were Representatives from SECA states, sending a mostly symbolic message of solidarity with conservative principles.** Here's the list of those from the region who voted present or against the Speaker.

- ⇒ Rep. Brian Babin (TX)
- ⇒ Rep. Dave Brat (VA)
- ⇒ Rep Jim Bridenstine (OK)
- ⇒ Rep. Curt Clawson (FL)
- ⇒ Rep Scott DesJarlais (TN)
- ⇒ Rep. Louie Gohmert (TX)
- ⇒ Rep Walter Jones (NC)
- ⇒ Rep. Tom Massie (KY)



- ⇒ Rep. Mark Meadows (NC)
- ⇒ Rep. Rich Nugent (FL)
- ⇒ Rep. Gary Palmer (AL)
- ⇒ Rep. Bill Posey (FL)
- ⇒ Rep. Scott Rigell (VA)
- ⇒ Rep. Randy Weber (TX)

Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi was nominated by the Democrats and two SECA Representatives, Jim Cooper (TN) and Gwen Graham (FL) cast their votes for other candidates.

Source: *Here are the Republicans who voted against John Boehner for speaker*, Washington Post, 1/6/15, www.washingtonpost.com/blogs

Women and Girls of Color: A New White House Report

In November 2014, the White House Council on Women and Girls released a report, *Women and Girls of Color: Addressing Challenges and Expanding Opportunities*. This report was in response to criticism that the President's initiative, My Brother's Keeper, focused solely on the issues of boys of color and ignored similar issues that faced young girls and women.

The report noted that significant strides had been made educationally and economically by many women of color; “Yet, these achievements

may obscure the very real challenges and disparities that persist for women and girls of color. Girls of color still lag behind in their performance on standardized tests, and they are more likely to be suspended from school. Women and girls of color still face higher rates of poverty and receive lower wages for their work than their white peers, and they are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. Women of color still have some of the highest rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and other serious conditions, and they experience high rates of domestic violence. And when women are the primary or sole breadwinners for nearly half of all house-

holds of color, these disparities do not just affect them, but their families and communities as well.”

The report focuses on four areas:

- ◆ Education
- ◆ Economic Security
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Violence Against Women

To continue the effort, the White House will convene a *Working Group on Challenges and Opportunities for Women and Girls of Color*. For a copy of the report, go to www.whitehouse.gov

The Road Ahead: Five Major Challenges

As the new Congress is sworn in, many significant and difficult issues lie ahead. After many years of dysfunctional governing, the opportunity for bi-partisan legislative activity lies on the horizon.

Here are five issues that are singled out as “hurdles” for the new Congress by GQ Roll Call.

- 1) **Homeland Security & Immigration:** A budget bill was signed in 2014 that approved budgets through 2015 for all federal agencies but Homeland Security. This was a compromise reached to allow the President’s Executive Order on immigration to be re-visited in the new Congress. This deadline looms on **February 28th**, so very little time will expire between the installation of the new Congress and action needed on this appropriation. Immigration policy is a source of major ideological divisions, particularly within the Republican Party, and may be a major source of upheaval within the new Congress.
- 2) **Doc Fix:** This “fix” has been passed as a one-year extension many times and barely made it through the system in 2014. It has to do with reimbursements to physicians for care provided under Medicare. If the “patch” is not passed, those reimbursement rates fall, bringing into question the continuation of services by physicians to Medicare patients. House Resolu-

tion 4302 gave this problem another year in 2014 but the fix expires on **March 31, 2015**, another short deadline.

- 3) **Highway Trust Fund:** This fund maintains our roads, bridges and critical infrastructure. **It is due to run out of money by May 31, 2015.** This has essentially been an ideological battle focused on the issue of who should be responsible for maintaining the infrastructure: the federal government or the states.
- 4) **Export-Import Bank:** The Export-Import Bank of the United States is “the official export credit agency of the United States. Our mission is to ensure that U.S. companies – large and small – have access to the financing they need to turn export opportunities into sales....We fill gaps in the trade finance market by working with lenders and brokers to ensure that U.S. businesses get what they need to sell abroad and be competitive in international markets.” Debate continues on whether this is a structure that can be eliminated and the functions provided by the private sector. If it is not reauthorized by **June 30th**, the charter will lapse and the Bank will cease to exist.
- 5) **Federal Aviation Administration:** On **September 30th**, the operating appropriation for this federal agency

will expire. **(The same is true for all federal agencies currently operating on appropriations approved for this fiscal year.)**

This appropriation may generate fights concerning small regional and local airports....airports that the FAA has tried to close in the past. This has been a particular issue in the South, with small airports serving widely dispersed population areas.

Source: 5 Legislative Hurdles for New House GOP, GA Roll Call, 1/5/15, <http://blogs.rollcall.com/218>

SO....What’s It to Us?

For most of us, these are issues that are very foreign to the work we do. Unless we work with immigrants, are on Medicare or have a parent on Medicare, drive over a crumbling bridge every day or manage a farm or business that exports internationally, these problems seem pretty removed.

The problem— They have the potential to drain the energy in Congress. These are major issues with millions of dollars at stake and powerful constituencies who will be lobbying hard to get the best deal for their groups. How much time and attention can be focused on issues about which we know more (and probably care more) such as education, child care, family services, etc., will be the question. Will many of the appropriations for programs that are important to us be on auto-pilot during 2015 as these thorny issues are resolved or will there be debate and discussion on programs that benefit children and families? We’ll see.

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"A Voice for Southern
Children"

How to Use Public Policy Notes

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.

News to Note

Oklahoma

As the second state to lose a waiver from the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, Oklahoma has now developed a set of learning standards that match what the US Department of Education has required in order to regain that waiver. (Washington state was the first.) Although the state dropped its support for the Common Core Standards in June, the existing PASS (Priority Academic Student Skills) standards have been approved by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. This approval met the requirement of the Department of Education and the state is slated to have its waiver reinstated.

Tennessee

Kevin Huffman, Tennessee Education Commissioner has left his position with the state after serving for 3 years under Governor Gill Haslam. Huffman was known as a reformer and presided over the implementation of the Common Core Standards, a new teacher evaluation system and the state Achievement School District, which managed low performing schools in the 2011-2012 school year. On December 17, 2014, Governor Haslam announced that



the new Commissioner of Education would be **Dr. Candice McQueen**, Senior Vice President of Lipscomb University. She brings to the job a

background as an elementary and middle school teacher before assuming her position at Lipscomb.

South Carolina

The Supreme Court of South Carolina ended in 2014 a legal battle that had been waged by more than two dozen districts and the state of Carolina. This battle concerned funding of education for poor and rural students. The Supreme Court found that the state had failed to meet the "minimally adequate" education standard and the onus is now on the state to develop an acceptable funding formula.

Go to www.judicial.state.sc.us/opinions/ to read the decision in Abbeville County School District v. State (#27466), November 2014.