

# Public Policy Notes

## Southern Early Childhood Association

### What's Coming in Washington in 2011?

What can we expect from Washington in 2011? There are several issues that will impact policy debates and the financing that we have in place for early childhood education.

- 1) **The party composition of the U.S. House and Senate has changed** and the Republicans now hold a majority in the House. Democrats retain a small majority in the Senate. There is a great deal of discussion about eliminating partisanship and “working across the aisle” but it remains to be seen if a new atmosphere will prevail in Washington.
- 2) **Many of the new Congressional members**

**campaigned on very conservative platforms** and this means fiscal conservatism and a reduction in the growth and presence of the federal government. Republicans have already announced their intent to take federal spending back to 2008 levels.

- 3) **The federal government is operating under a continuing resolution that will expire in March.** If appropriation bills are not passed at that point, Congress will either need to pass another continuing resolution or the federal government will close because there will be no

spending authority in place.

- 4) **House Republicans have announced their intent to repeal the Health Care Reform Act,** although it is highly unlikely that the Senate would vote for repeal. Regardless, the components of the bill are under review and you'll likely see some major changes in how that system will look.
- 5) **The US Supreme Court** will decide if the mandate that individuals buy health insurance is constitutional.

#### **MONEY & IDEOLOGY 2011 in Washington!**

### *Twenty-Six States Challenge Health Care Law*

Building on a lawsuit that was filed by the Attorney General of Florida immediately upon the signing of the Health Care Reform Act, twenty-six states are now challenging the new law. The challenge is based on two issues:

- 1) The constitutionality of the individual mandate

that will force individuals to purchase health insurance, either through private companies or through the federal system.

- 2) The mandate that states expand their Medicaid systems to cover larger populations. State Medicaid budgets are

already one of the biggest contributors to state budget deficits and the federal money to support the new mandates is short term.

Over half of US states are now challenging the law. Many SECA states are included in that list.

January 2011

Volume 4, Issue 1

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#### News to Note

Kate Thegen will be our featured speaker at the 2011 Leadership Summit in Savannah. She is representing the *Frameworks Institute*, a group that helps constituencies learn to “frame their message.” In late February, we'll post some of the resources and insights that Kate provides on the Public Policy Page of the website. Be sure to check for the information.

## Trend #1 in 2011: The Stimulus Money is Going

During 2009 and 2010, the federal government provided billions of dollars to states to support struggling economies. These dollars provided support in our field for the following, among other things:

1. An expansion of Head Start
2. An increase in the Child Care & Development Block Grant.
3. Educational support to avoid layoffs of teachers and school staff.

That money was “one-time” money and for those states that used it to shore up ailing operational budgets and expand

services, the support is coming to an end.

Most supporters of the stimulus anticipated that the economy would improve by this point so that enhanced state tax revenues would be able to fill those “holes” that were filled by stimulus money. They hoped that any expansion in services provided by the stimulus funds would be future funded through federal appropriations.

Unfortunately, the economy hasn’t improved significantly enough (although the beginning signs are there) to close some of the major budget gaps in states,

and with the 2010 elections, it is highly improbable that any of the expanded initiatives funded through the stimulus will be continued.

### What does this mean for your state?

You’ll need to know where the money went and what impact its loss will have.

For example, in Arkansas, some money was used to expand child care subsidies for a short period; however, those subsidies ended and there were no funds to replace them. The waiting list has grown significantly again.

## Trend #2 in 2011: Many SECA States Still Have Big Budget Holes

In 2010, many states were faced with enormous budget deficits and they took action to eliminate those deficits. Different approaches were utilized to cut the deficits and you may anticipate that some of these approaches will continue into 2011.

**Cuts to State Employee Benefits:** Georgia and Virginia

**Across the Board Percent Cuts:** Alabama, Arkansas Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Caro-

lina, Virginia, West Virginia

**Targeted Cuts:** Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia

**Reduction of Local Aid to Cities & Counties:** South Carolina and Virginia

**Reorganization of Agencies:** Florida

**Rainy Day Fund:** Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee

**Lottery Expansion & Gaming/Gambling Expansion:** No SECA States

Source: *The Fiscal Survey of the States, Fall 2010, Table 12*, <http://nasbo.org>

As states implemented these approaches to reducing state budget deficits, many faced what used to be the “sacred cows” of state government: significant reductions in public school financing and public safety net programs such as Medicaid.

## Trend #3 in 2011: The States Owe the Federal Government

During 2010, as unemployment stayed steady around 9% or above in many states, federal unemployment benefits were extended to support those out of work for long periods of time.

Although this supported people who needed the help, it didn’t come without a price tag and many states were forced to borrow from the federal government to provide those benefits.

(Unemployment benefits are financed

through levies on employers and states may borrow funds from the federal government during times of high unemployment if their trust funds aren’t sufficient.)

As with any loan, interest charges accrue on monies borrowed and states are now facing paying back millions of dollars (principal and interest) to the federal government, even though their finances have not improved.

Some states are investigating whether to float a bond issue to repay the loan and may be able to get a lower rate of interest on the bonds than the federal government will charge.

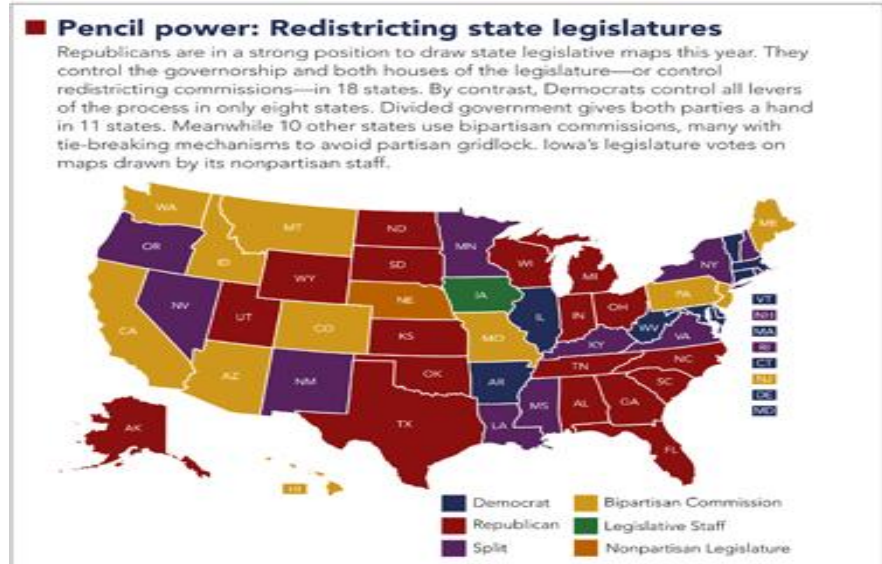
**Why is this important to you?** It’s important because it’s another multi-million dollar budget item that the state will have to figure out how to pay.

**Where will the money come from in your state budget?**

## Trend # 4 in 2011: Your Representation in Congress May Change

Every 10 years, re-districting occurs. This means that population trends dictate how many representatives your state sends to the U.S. House of Representatives. (For more information on the process, go to *Public Policy Notes, December 2010, Volume 3, #12*) It is anticipated that Louisiana will lose representation in the process while Texas will gain, based on population losses and gains.

This process can be one that is partisan in nature and the SECA states have become more “red or Republican” in the last 10 years. The shift in how districts are drawn can affect the partisan balance in Washington.



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, Rose Institute of State and Local Government, Stateline reporting

[Click to enlarge](#)

## Trend #5 in 2011: Will Early Childhood Funding Be Under Attack?

In most SECA states except Florida (which has a constitutional requirement that pre-K be provided), pre-K is a discretionary program. Funding for the program is not included in the school funding formula and legislators have discretion about how much and where to fund pre-K services.

Although we've managed in the South to avoid any major reductions in funding for pre-K, 2011 may be the year when the discussion begins. In North Caro-

lina, advocates are fighting to maintain the Smart Start program, a program that has been nationally recognized.

Additionally, since most of our programs are fairly new, extensive research data about the efficacy of the programs is not available.

**How will you answer these questions if the debate begins?**

- 1) Are the children who attend pre-K in your state more likely to succeed

in kindergarten and first grade?

- 2) What makes your program effective and efficient?
- 3) Are your program's administrative costs low—Is most of the funding going to provide programs for children?
- 4) Can you prove the results of your program? Why continue to fund it?

## Trend #6 in 2011: The “Frills” Will Be Restricted

If you've tried to get travel authorization for something like the SECA conference, you may have already encountered this trend. Generally, the “frills” (particularly in education) are the following:

1. Travel for professional development
2. Classroom aides
3. Support personnel in schools, such as nurses or lunchroom monitors

4. New technology and equipment
5. Extra-curricular programs
6. Art and music programs

As states cut back and schools feel the pinch, it will take thoughtful and visionary planning to figure out how to utilize funds as efficiently as possible to maintain many of the gains we've made over the past few years.

If you're a teacher, you'll probably be

asked to do more with less and some states are even considering altering their laws on class size to place more children with fewer teachers.

**Your message is going to be more important than ever. Do you know how to make your case for why some things are important? Are you willing to be a part of the solution rather than the problem by working with your colleagues to prioritize how your school's money should be spent?**

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Southern Early Childhood Association



"A Voice for Southern Children"

We're on the Web!  
[www.southernearlychildhood.org](http://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.

## Getting Your Message Across

Regardless of whether you're advocating for children, working on community projects or supporting a cause or group, the principles of communicating with your legislators are the same.

If you're writing or calling your legislator, what should you do?

1. Explain why you care about the issue.
2. Keep it simple.
3. Focus on one topic.
4. Don't just complain: support a specific proposal.
5. Keep it short.
6. If you can, include facts and data
7. Be polite.

Source:

<http://www.houselogic.com/articles/7-tips-writing-letters-change-home-town/>

Some other things to consider:

- **Remember that legislators are inundated with constituent calls.** Don't be upset if you speak to a staff person instead of the legislator. That staff person is responsible for ensuring that his/her boss knows how his constituents are thinking.
- **Try to keep your phone call to 2-3 minutes. A letter shouldn't be more than a page.** That requires you to think ahead about what you want to say—notes can be helpful before you call or write.

- **If you can meet your legislator when they are not in session at the Capitol, you have a better chance of developing a personal relationship.** Become that legislator's (or staff person's) "go-to expert". You know more about our field than he or she does and you can share your personal experience.
- **Don't ever burn your bridges.** You may be angry and things may not go your way this time, but you may have a different result on a different issue in the future.

**Keep your cool and make your case.** That's what a good advocate is all about!