

Southern Early Childhood Association

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association



States Facing Large Budget Deficits Ask Congress For Assistance

The National Governors' Association (NGA) is preparing a proposal for Congress that will seek \$126 billion of federal funding to help states pay for rebuilding infrastructure, expand social programs and extend unemployment benefits.

Governor Ed Rendall of Pennsylvania, Chairman of the NGA and Vermont Governor James Douglas met with Congressional leaders on Monday, December 1, 2008 to provide a preview of the Association's proposal.

The South has 3 states that are facing the largest FY 2009 budget gaps among the 50 states. Those states are

**Florida (\$5.1 billion gap),
Virginia (\$2.2 billion gap) and
Georgia (\$1.8 billion gap).**

Other SECA states are also facing budget deficits. Oklahoma, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee & North Carolina are facing budget shortfalls between 1-8% of general funds. Alabama and South

Carolina are facing budget gaps of between 8-16% of general funds.

There are some bright spots in the SECA region. Texas, Louisiana and West Virginia anticipate no budget shortfalls for FY 2009.

The National Governor's Association is asking for support to maintain Medicaid (health care for the low-income), maintain extended unemployment benefits and supply college grant funds. The Governors have also said that states have more than \$136 billion in infrastructure projects that could be started immediately and a study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials estimated that 3,100 projects could begin within 3 months of the release of federal funds. NGA prefers infrastructure projects to previous stimulus packages because of job creation opportunities with those projects.

States have already implemented \$53 billion in budget cuts for FY 2009.

Source: *Wall Street Journal*, 12-2-08

How Budget Shortfalls May Impact You

Each time that a state faces a budget shortfall, decisions must be made about where cuts can be made to balance those budgets.

- 1) Since all of our state affiliates provide state conferences, you may anticipate that travel and training budgets will be cut as a first cost-saving measure. This could impact your bottom line with decreased conference attendance.
- 2) Pressure may be put on local programs to maintain staffing and quality standards as funds are decreased. Affiliates should remain vigilant to ensure that standards are not weakened to meet economic conditions.
- 3) The number of children served in your state may decrease as program funds are cut. Personnel may be laid off, with a potential loss of members for your affiliate.

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Special points of interest:

- State Budget Gaps
- Children's Health Insurance
- The US Senate and that Magic 60 Mark
- SECA Governors Opposed to Federal Bailouts
- What Our School Kids are Eating

Children's Health Care on the Fast Track

Democratic Congressional leaders are currently discussing the first 100 days of the new Obama administration, and children's health care may be one of the winners. During the Presidential campaign, President-Elect Obama stated his support of enhanced health care for children and the expansion of the SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) may be one of the easiest victories for the new administration.

At the end of 2007, President Bush twice vetoed a plan to expand SCHIP by \$35 billion over 5 years. He described the expansion as the first step toward socialized medicine because of the in-



SCHIP makes health care for low-income children available at affordable rates for families and serves many SECA children.

crease in eligibility standards that would allow more families to access the program. The program's funding expires at the end of March 2009, so Congress must act by then, regardless of whether the expansion occurs.

Other legislative initiatives being considered for the "fast track" are a requirement that electric utilities derive 15% of their energy from renewable sources by the year 2020 and an expansion of federal funding for embryonic stem-cell research.

As the country is now in a confirmed recession, loss of employer-sponsored health care and employment impact the ability of many of the South's families in their ability to provide adequate health care for their children. Enhancing the income levels that families are eligible for with SCHIP would help to bridge the health care gap until families are again eligible for employer sponsored plans or have the financial ability to cover costs in the family budget.

Educational Levels of Illinois Early Childhood Teachers Increase

A new study of the early childhood workforce in Illinois has found that the educational levels of people working in early childhood education has substantially increased over the past seven years.

The number of community-based lead teachers holding a bachelor's degree increased from 37% to 48% during the period of 2001 to 2008. Additionally, almost 20% of those teachers hold early childhood teacher certification.

The study, *Who's Caring for the Kids? The Status of the Early Childhood Workforce in Illinois-2008*, was conducted by National-Louis University's McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership and the Early Childhood Par-

enting Collaborative at the University of Illinois.

Early childhood professionals in the SECA states may be interested in information about the Illinois Quality Rating System and development of their statewide professional development system. Illinois has also implemented Preschool for All, and the professional development system and QRS have been developed to support that initiative.

This publication is available on-line at

<http://cecl.nl.edu/ebulletin/issues/wckdec08.htm>

The National Children's Study

With its goal to improve the health and well-being of children, the National Children's Study will examine the effects of environmental influences on the health and development of 100,000 children across the United States. The study will follow the children from birth to age 21, through their different phases of growth and development and provide insights on the role of environmental factors on health and disease.

In 2009 and 2010, the Southern states will be the beneficiary of many new start-up sites. These sites will be funded to maintain the research over a period of years and will begin recruiting women of child-bearing age in 2009 and 2010.

The first enrollees in the program are expected in 2011.

The SECA states will have 42 of those study centers, perhaps reflecting the poor health status of the South in comparison with much of the United States.

For more information on the sites in your state, go to www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov



Democrats Still One Vote Shy of Reaching the 60 Mark

A run-off election in Georgia decided whether the US Senate would become a filibuster-proof institution or whether the Democratic majority would remain one vote shy of reaching that mark.

Saxby Chambliss, a Georgia Republican, was the incumbent in a Senate seat that came out of the general election facing a run-off with challenger Jim Martin, a Democrat. If Senator Chambliss lost the election, the Democrats would achieve 60 seats in the Senate, a number which could prevent a filibuster from taking place.



Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA)

With Senator Chambliss's victory, the Senate Democrats remain at the 59

seat level, although there is one contested race still to be resolved. In Minnesota, a recount was required by state law, and it is anticipated that it will be completed by the middle of December. As of the date of this newsletter (December 4, 2008), the Republican incumbent was ahead. Both candidates have challenged votes and are beginning to withdraw some of those challenges, so the process of a final vote recount may be faster than anticipated.

A filibuster is a delaying tactic employed by the minority party to delay a vote on a particular bill. The filibuster can only be stopped by a cloture vote, a vote to stop the debate, and the Democrats need 60 seats to be sure they can achieve that. Without this majority, it will require bi-partisan agreement to end any filibuster.

Two SECA Governors Opposed to Federal Bailouts

Governor Rick Perry (R-TX) and Governor Mark Sanford (R-SC) were the author of an op-ed article in the *Wall Street Journal* (12-2-08) that stated their opposition to federal bailouts. Their objections were based on the following:

- 1) "We're crossing the Rubicon with regard to debt...Borrowing money to solve a problem created by debt seems odd."
- 2) "The bailout mentality threatens Americans' sense of personal responsibility....To an unprecedented degree, government is currently picking winners and losers in the marketplace and throwing good money after bad."
- 3) "We'd ask the federal government to stop believing it

has all the answers....Our Founding Fathers were clear and deliberate in setting up a system whereby the federal government would only step in for that which states cannot do themselves."

The Governors stated that in their states, Texas and South Carolina, they've focused on improving conditions that help support business creation by cutting taxes and reforming the legal and worker's compensation systems. They also suggested that Congress focus on targeted tax relief paid for by cutting spending, not by borrowing.

"We can weather this storm if we commit to fiscal prudence and hold true to the values of individual freedom and responsibility that made our nation great."

School Food Unwrapped

A new study, *School Food Unwrapped: What's Available and What Our Kids Actually Are Eating*, released by Child Trends in November 2008 examines the food that's available in elementary schools and the potential impact on the health and well-being of school children. The study found that:

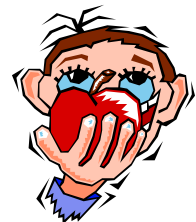
- 1) More than half (57.2%) of elementary schools reported that students can purchase food or beverages through vending machines, à la carte items in the cafeteria or school snack bars.
- 2) Contrary to popular belief, most of the unhealthy foods purchased in schools (sweets & salty snacks) were pur-

chased in the school cafeteria, not through vending machines.

"Our findings suggest that efforts to change school food policies should examine all cafeteria offerings in addition to vending machines," according to Elizabeth Hair, Ph.D, lead author of the study.

What kind of food does your school provide? Do you set an example for your students?

For a copy of the study, go to www.childtrends.org.



Healthy foods = healthy kids.

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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 find 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 Health Status of the SECA States: We've Got a Long Way to Go

The United Health Foundation, a private non-profit advocacy group based in Minnesota, issued its 19th annual health rankings of states. The Foundation produced the report with the Partnership for Prevention and the American Public Health Association. There were some bright spots and some not so wonderful news for the SECA region.

Rankings were based on 22 factors, including rates of smoking, obesity, alcohol abuse, infant mortality and cancer deaths. With these factors taken into account, the health status of the nation as a whole remained stagnant, with no improvement occurring over the past four years.

Some SECA states that saw gains in their ranking in the US in 2008:

- Alabama (from 45th in 2007 to 40th in 2008)
- Arkansas (from 48th in 2007 to 43rd in 2008)
- Kentucky (from 43rd in 2007 to 37th in 2008)
- Mississippi (from 50th in 2007 to 49th in 2008)

- Oklahoma (from 47th in 2007 to 43rd in 2008)
 - Virginia (from 22nd in 2007 to 20th in 2008)
 - West Virginia (from 44th in 2007 to 39th in 2008)
- SECA states with lower rankings in 2008 included:**
- Florida (from 41st in 2007 to 45th in 2008)
 - Georgia (from 40th in 2007 to 41st in 2008)
 - Louisiana (from 49th in 2007 to 50th in 2008)
 - South Carolina (from 42nd in 2007 to 48th in 2008)
 - Tennessee (from 46th in 2007 to 47th in 2008)
 - Texas (from 37th in 2007 to 46th in 2008)

There were some common health challenges among the SECA states: obesity, children in poverty, air pollution, low immunization rates, high cancer death rates, smoking, high incidence of infectious disease, high rate of cardiovascular disease.

As President-Elect Obama begins his tenure, the discussion concerning availability of health care will have particular significance for the South.