

# Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

## The Fiscal Cliff—What to Expect?

As we near the end of 2012, the debate continues in Washington about the “fiscal cliff”. At this point in time, there’s not much to report, except to say that the proposals continue to move between the White House (President Obama) and the House of Representatives (Speaker John Boehner).

A major sticking point in the negotiations is the President’s position on raising tax rates for the “rich” and the definition of what “rich” means. Speaker Boehner has presented a proposal that defines the “rich” as those making above

\$1 million per year: the President has proposed a threshold of \$250,000 per year.

The debate concerning specific spending reductions also continues, including reining in spending on entitlements (Social Security, Medicare & Medicaid.)

When we publish the next edition of *Public Policy Notes* in January 2013, we’ll have some answers. Either the sequester will have occurred and across the

board budget cuts are on the way or a compromise will have been reached to avoid implementing the sequester.

There is even some talk about implementing the sequester, one sure way of reducing the federal deficit without anyone having to make difficult decisions.

We’ve covered this issue in the last few issues of this newsletter—let’s hope we have good news to report in January. The future of many federal programs and the financial standing of the United States in the world is hanging in the balance.

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## It’s That Time Again!

It’s time for our state legislatures to convene and begin to debate the policy directions that will affect our states during the next several years.

Following are legislative dates:

### Alabama

February 5-May 20

### Arkansas

January 14-March 14

### Florida

March 5-May 2

### Georgia

January 14-early April

### Kentucky

January 8-March 26

### Louisiana

April 8-June 6

### Mississippi

January 8-April 7

### North Carolina

January 30-early July

### Oklahoma

February 4-May 31

### South Carolina

January 8-June 6

### Tennessee

January 8-Mid May

### Texas

January 8-May 27

### Virginia

January 9-February 7

### West Virginia

February 13-April 13

Source: <http://www.ncsl.org>

### Grants Announced for Second Round of Race-to-the-Top

The \$133 million available for early childhood programs in the second round has been awarded to the states of:

- Colorado
- Illinois
- New Mexico
- Oregon
- Wisconsin

# Florida Hires Commissioner of Education



**Dr. Tony Bennett**

As previously reported in *Public Policy Notes*, Florida has undergone a major transition in the state's Department of Education.

On December 12, 2012, the Florida Board of Education unanimously appointed Tony Bennett, the outgoing chief of education in the state of Indiana.

Bennett was a controversial head of education that failed to win re-election in November. He suffered a rocky relationship with the Indiana teacher's union. During his tenure in Indiana, he instituted:

- ⇒ A to F grading for schools.
- ⇒ Scaled-back teacher tenure.
- ⇒ A broad private school voucher system.
- ⇒ A third-grade reading test that students were required to pass in order to progress to fourth grade.

Bennett received support from the Foundation for Educational Excellence (founded by former Governor Jeb Bush) and Michelle Rhee (former head of the Washington, D.C. schools and founder of Students-First).

"Tony has a great record of achievement in Indiana and I am confident he will be a tireless advocate for Florida's students". A statement from Governor Rick Scott. *Source: Florida Hires Outgoing Indiana Ed Chief, Pew Center on the States, <http://pewstates.org>, retrieved 12/17/12.*

## State Tax Projections for 2013: What Legislators Will See

The National Council of State Legislatures produces regular reports concerning state revenue projections and the report, *NCSL Fiscal Brief: Projected State Tax Growth in FY 2013*, was released in September. The report paints a more positive picture than we've seen in the past few years; however, the projected growth is small and many state programs, particularly Medicaid will make budgeting decisions difficult.

The report compares the FY 2012 and FY 2013 tax receipts and there are several things to note:

- 1) *Nearly 3/4 of the states project growth between 1 and 4.9%.*
- 2) *2012 featured the smallest aggregate tax cut (0.2%) in NCSL's 32-year history of collecting this data.*
- 3) *Although the figures show increases, these are the comparisons with 2012, a year with historically low revenues during the recession. Source: [www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)*

State	Total Tax	Personal Income	General Sales	Corporate	Severance
AL	1.0%	3.0%	3.0%	5.0%	4.0%
AR	3.0%	2.8%	3.6%	4.2%	7.7%
FL	5.8%	n/a	4.5%	14.7%	-3.8%
GA	4.7%	6.0%	5.0%	9.0%	X
KY	2.4%	2.3%	2.3%	7.8%	3.2%
LA	2.3%	5.7%	4.9%	11.0%	1.8%
MS	1.3%	2.4%	2.3%	0.0%	0.9%
NC	3.3%	3.1%	3.9%	1.8%	n/a
OK	4.8%	9.3%	10.1%	58.2%	-43.3%
SC	3.8%	4.2%	4.2%	-8.4%	n/a
TN	3.6%	9.1%	4.0%	4.1%	0.0%
TX	0.4%	X	0.4%	X	
VA	3.7%	3.6%	4.6%	7.0%	n/a
WV	1.0%	2.0%	-2.0%	32.0%	-1.0%

## Women in State Legislatures in 2013

Women have been steadily gaining seats in the Southern legislatures and the percentages of women represented in the SECA states ranges from 11.1% in Louisiana to 25% in Florida.

Our issues have traditionally been championed by women but that is also changing. Early childhood education has found a group of both bipartisan and male & female supporters throughout our states. How does your state fare in the representation of women in the legislature? National percentages are around 20%.

**Alabama** 13.6%  
14 House/5 Senate

**Arkansas** 17.8%  
18 House/6 Senate

**Florida** 25%  
28 House/12 Senate

**Georgia** 22.9%  
46 House/8 Senate

**Kentucky** 18.1%  
19 House/6 Senate

**Louisiana** 11.1%  
12 House/4 Senate

**Mississippi** 16.7%  
21 House/8 Senate

**North Carolina** 21.8%  
31 House/6 Senate

**Oklahoma** 13.4%  
16 House/4 Senate

**South Carolina** 12.9%  
21 House/1 Senate

**Tennessee** 17.4%  
16 House/7 Senate

**Texas** 19.9%  
30 House/6 Senate

**Virginia** 17.9%  
18 House/6 Senate

**West Virginia** 16.4%  
21 House/1 Senate



Senator Leticia Van de Putte of Texas



Rep. Anastasia Pittman of Oklahoma



Beth Harwell, Speaker of the House, Tennessee

## State Reading Policies Designed to Ensure Children Can Read

As the Common Core Standards in English/language arts are being implemented throughout the South and nation, many states have taken the extra step of passing laws that call for the identification of children who are having reading problems before they reach 3rd grade, require interventions for those children and, in some cases, mandatory retention if the child does not perform adequately on a state test. 32 states plus the District of Columbia have statutes in place, according to the Education Commis-

sion of the States.

**North Carolina** schools must retain 3rd graders not reading on grade level, unless they meet one of several exemptions. Prior to retention, students must be provided summer reading camps and have multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. Assessments and early interventions must begin in kindergarten. (Passed 2012, overriding Governor's veto.)

**Oklahoma** requires schools to

retain 3rd graders who score "unsatisfactory" on the state reading exam. Intervention begins in kindergarten. (Passed 2011)

**Virginia** requires local districts to provide reading intervention services to 3rd graders who demonstrate deficiencies on a state test or other diagnostic assessment. The law does not require retention. (Passed 2012)

Source: *Education Week*, November 14, 2012, p. S4

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"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.

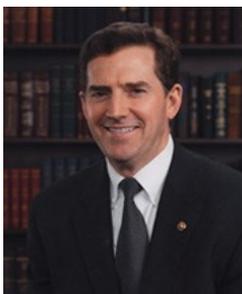
You'll find information that:

- **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.

## News to Note

### Senate's Most Conservative Member Resigns



Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC), one of the most conservative Senators in Wash-

Senator Jim DeMint

ington, announced in early December that he would be resigning from the U. S. Senate to become President of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative "think tank".

Governor Nikki Haley an-

nounced on December 17th, that Tim Scott will move from the U.S House of Representatives to the U.S Senate until a special election can be held in 2014 to fill the seat on a permanent basis. Senator Scott will be the first black Senator from the South since the 1890's and is known for his conservative



Tim Scott

views. He will be sworn in on January 3rd. Source: *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 12/18/12

### Tea Party Champion Resigns

Former GOP House Majority



Dick Armey

Leader Dick Armey has resigned from FreedomWorks, the Tea Party organization that Armey has served as chairman. Armey is a veteran political figure in Texas who rose to prominence in the U.S. House of Representatives and was involved in the 1990's Contract with America movement. Armey says that he has left because of "an internal split over the group's future direction." Source: *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 12/5/12