

Public Policy Notes

Southern Early Childhood Association

The Advocacy Challenges We Face

With this issue of *Public Policy Notes*, we're reporting on the new developments in Washington.

1. The President has proposed a **new nationwide pre-K initiative** that is designed to promote quality programs for all children, regardless of income.
2. The "Gang of Eight" has put forth a **bi-partisan proposal for immigration reform**.
3. The **FY 2014 budget** is currently on the table and the issue of whether the sequester holds (with the consequent budget cuts) is in the mix.
4. The issue of **gun control legislation** is being hotly debated.

That said, we, as advocates in the South, will face some significant challenges as we move forward to promote programs that impact children and families.

What are those challenges?

⇒ The South has moved

from Democratic to Republican majorities. The conservative nature of our Congressional representatives increases the difficulty of getting support for new initiatives in an era of budget cuts and deficit reduction.

⇒ The President has proposed to increase the federal tax on tobacco/cigarettes to fund the new pre-K initiative. Our region boasts the top tobacco producing regions of the country. This new tax may have an economic impact on some Southern economies.

⇒ Immigration is a tough issue in the South, although our region is currently showing the fastest growing population of immigrants in the country. Because

of our agricultural economy, we have many immigrant farm workers and their families in our states.

⇒ Because of our socio-economic status, the impact of budget cuts may be more fully felt in the South than other regions. We have more people eligible for just about every federal support program than other parts of the country.

⇒ Gun control and the South is a difficult subject. Southerners are hunters and fiercely protective of gun rights.

Although that may sound like doom and gloom, it just means that we have to be savvy and smart about how we approach our advocacy efforts. The first thing is to make sure you're well informed.

This issue gives you information on three major new federal legislative initiatives. **Become an informed advocate!**

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How to Contact Your Representatives in Congress

Go to the SECA website and click on "Our States" at the top of the home page.

When the drop down menu appears, click on "State Advocacy Contacts" and select your state. You'll get immediate access to the information you're seeking.

No more searching the web!

The President's Proposal: Early Education for All Americans



Photo retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov, 4/16/13

In his State of the Union message in February President Obama called on Congress to support early childhood education....a major initiative announced in a major address to the country. *“In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children...studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let’s do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind.”* President Obama, State of the Union, February 12, 2013

At that time, the President proposed a three-prong approach:

- ◇ Providing High-Quality Preschool for Every Child
- ◇ Growing the Supply of Effective Early Learning Opportunities for Young Children
- ◇ Extending and Expanding Evidence-Based, Voluntary Home Visiting.

With the release of his budget in April, we got the specifics.

Preschool for All: The President proposes to invest \$75 billion over 10 years in an initiative to expand access to high-quality preschool, starting with low-and-moderate income four-year-olds.

million in **discretionary funding** would be provided for Preschool Development Grants to help states start on the path toward universal pre-K. Eligible grantees would include states without current programs.

- In FY 2014, \$1.3 billion in **mandatory funding** would be provided to states that already have high-quality pre-K programs.
- States would be required to **set quality standards** that incorporate several essential elements: well-qualified staff with teachers required to have a bachelor’s degree; professional development for teachers and staff; low child-staff ratios and small class sizes; full-day services; DAP/evidence based curricula and learning environments that are aligned with state early learning standards; salaries that are comparable to salaries for K-12; on-going program evaluation and on-site comprehensive services for children.
- States would be required to **contribute non-federal matching funds**, with the match reduced for states that

serve additional children from middle-income families after reaching a benchmark for the percentage of low-to-moderate income children served.

- These funds could be utilized to provide **high-quality full-day kindergarten** in states where kindergarten is only half-day.
- The budget proposes \$15 billion over 10 years for **Voluntary Home Visiting Programs**.
- **Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships** would be funded by \$1.4 billion in FY 2014 to expand infant/toddler care, nearly doubling the number currently served in Early Head Start. Under the plan, a greater number of infants/toddlers and three-year-olds would be served by Head Start while state preschool programs would serve a greater share of four-year-olds.

These points just touch the surface: there are more specifics to the plan. **Here are the resources to help you find the information that you need.**

Fact Sheet/President Obama’s Plan for Early Education for All Americans, www.whitehouse.gov

Fact Sheet/President Obama’s Early Learning Plan, National Women’s Law Center, <http://www.nwlc.org>

Questions & Answers/President Obama’s Plan for Early Education, National Women’s Law Center, <http://www.nwlc.org>

The Gang of Eight: A Bi-partisan Proposal for Immigration Reform

During the last week, the “buzz” about an immigration reform plan has increased as the **Gang of Eight** moved toward a consensus bill that would overhaul the current federal immigration laws.

The **Gang of Eight** included Senators from states with significant immigrant populations and issues. **Included in that group were two Senators from SECA States:**



Senator Graham

John McCain (R-AZ)

Marco Rubio (R-FL)

Lindsey Graham (R-SC)

Jeff Flake (R-AZ)

Chuck Schumer (D-NY)

Dick Durbin (D-IL)

Robert Menendez (D-NJ)

Michael Bennet (D-CO)

On **April 17, 2013**, the *Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013* was formally introduced in the Senate.

Following the bill’s introduction, **Senator Rubio** issued a statement that included the following statement. “Our immigration system is broken, and the status quo of having 11 million undocumented people living under de facto amnesty will only continue if we do nothing to solve this problem. This bill marks the beginning of an important debate, and I believe it will fix our broken system by securing



Senator Rubio and Family

our borders, improving interior enforcement, modernizing our legal immigration to help create jobs and protect American workers, and dealing with our undocumented population in a tough but humane way that is fair to those trying to come here the right way and linked to achieving several security triggers.”

According to a summary posted on Senator Rubio’s website, the bill contains the following provisions.

Border Security & Enforcement Measures

- 1) Creation, funding & initiation of a border security & border fence plan within 6 months of the bill’s enactment.
- 2) Border Security Triggers: Achievement of 100% border awareness & 90% apprehension rates of illegals in high-risk sectors of the US-Mexico border within 5 years.
- 3) If the federal government fails to meet the thresholds in item #2, a Border Commission of state officials and stakeholders will be created to achieve the goals.
- 4) Employment verification through a federal system within 10 years.

- ◆ Implementation of a visa exit system to stop visa overstays within 10 years.

Modernizing the Legal Immigration System to Promote Job Creation for American Workers

- ◆ Protects American jobs by limiting work visas only to areas with unemployment rates below 8.5%.
- ◆ Creates a guest worker program for lower-skilled workers and an agricultural guest worker program.

Dealing with the Current Undocumented Population

- ◆ The border security triggers must be accomplished before any undocumented worker is eligible to apply for temporary status.
- ◆ No amnesty. Once the security triggers are achieved, undocumented workers must meet a certain criteria to become “legal”.
- ◆ Undocumented immigrants will not be eligible for federal benefits.
- ◆ Young documented people whose parents brought them to the US illegally or overstayed visas, will be eligible for permanent residence in 5 years and citizenship immediately thereafter.

If you’d like to read the full summary, go to <http://www.rubio.senate.gov>.

If you work with federal programs that support families, the outcome of this legislation may influence services to immigrant families.

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"A Voice for Southern Children"

We're on the Web!
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.

Public Policy Notes is written and produced monthly by Glenda Bean, Executive Director of SECA. Interested persons may sign up for free access to the newsletter at www.southernearlychildhood.org.



Senator Manchin

In the wake of the shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, gun control legislation has begun to make its way through the U.S. Senate with the full support of President Obama. A SECA state senator, **Democrat Joe Manchin of West Virginia**, has submitted a proposal for Senate consideration, partnering with a Republican from Pennsylvania,

Gun Control: A Challenge in the U.S. Senate

Senator Pat Toomey. The **Public Safety and Second Amendment Rights Protection Act** expands existing background checks to gun show and online sales.

According to a press release on Senator Manchin's website, the Act is "**to prevent convicted criminals and the dangerously mentally ill from purchasing guns, while not infringing on law-abiding gun owners' Second Amendment rights.**" Senator Manchin represents a state that has been fiercely "gun rights" and is himself a member of the National Rifle Association (NRA)

Another SECA state Senator, **Republican Richard Burr of North Carolina** has stated his opposition to the bill. "After reviewing the cur-



Senator Burr

rent text of the Manchin-Toomey proposal, I have numerous Second Amendment, due process and privacy concerns that make the legislation too problematic for it to ever become law." Senator Burr

Two Senate Democrats voted against beginning the gun control debate. **Senator Mark Pryor of Arkansas** was one of the two.

Source: <http://www.fox.news.com>