

Public Policy Notes

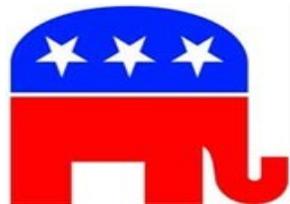
Southern Early Childhood Association

The Senate and Health Care Reform

After weeks of heated debate, the US Senate removed the last procedural hurdle to passage of a health care reform bill on December 21, 2009 and the final vote on the bill was held on December 22, 2009. The bill passed with a 60-39 vote—58 Democrats and two Independents against all 39 Senate Republicans. The final bill consisted of many compromises, and the major one included the exclusion of a “public option” or public insurance plan.

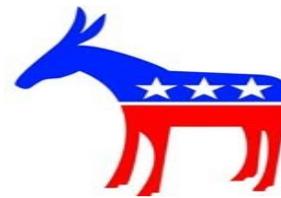
In order to get to the 60 votes needed for passage, it has been reported that some Senators had special exclusions and “deals” cut

to vote in favor of the bill. As reported in the media, the SECA winners in the bill included:



FLORIDA—The state is exempted from the bill’s provisions that affect the Medicare Advantage plans for seniors and this action removed \$3 to \$5 billion in savings from the reform savings estimates.

LOUISIANA—Senator Landrieu received a special \$300 million subsidy for



Senate Republicans and Democrats—Can they work together? Not on Health Care Reform

her state’s Medicaid program because of the impact of hurricane Katrina. **Mississippi and Texas**, two other SECA states similarly affected, didn’t receive the same benefit. *Source: Arkansas Democrat Gazette, December 29, 2009.* Democrats are working toward final passage by the President’s State of the Union speech.

Update on States & the Early Childhood Advisory Councils

The New American Foundation issued a report in November 2009 entitled, *The Next Step in Systems-Building: Early Childhood Advisory Councils and Federal Efforts to Promote Policy Alignment in Early Childhood.*

The report contains a state-

by-state update on Advisory Council development, information on funding challenges, a list of the entities in each state (new or existing) that will be utilized as the Advisory Council, and information on persons interviewed in each state.

SECA published a preliminary policy brief, *Early Childhood Advisory Councils*, in July 2009. The brief was updated in December 2009 to incorporate information included in this report. *Source: www.EarlyEdWatch.org*

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K-12 Common Core Standards Draft to Be Released in January

The draft of the standards is scheduled for release for public comment in January 2010. To get more information about the standards and draft, go to www.ccsso.org.

Mississippi Governor Proposes Additional Budget Cuts for FY 2011

In September 2009, Governor Barbour ordered a revision to FY 2010 budgets for all state agencies. The state was facing a revenue shortfall of \$171,925,753 and the Governor is required to ensure a balanced budget. Education was not spared from those cuts and 5% of education budgets were cut, although this meant that schools still received more money than in FY 2009 because of an appropriation increase enacted for FY 2010.

The picture has become gloomier for FY 2011 and, on November 16, 2009, Governor Barbour presented his Execu-

tive Budget Recommendations that include 12% cuts below FY 2010 appropriated levels.

Education was spared the full cut and Governor Barbour has recommended a 10.9% cut or a reduction of \$237 million for the Mississippi Adequate Education Program.

He is also recommending that this budget provide an opportunity for realigning the educational structure to reduce administrative costs. His

proposal includes a recommendation that the “152 school districts across 82 counties be consolidated to reduce administrative costs in the short term,



Governor Haley Barbour

to match effective teachers with “right-sized” classes and to push more money into the classroom, improving educational achievement by our K-12 students.” He also recom-

mends that districts utilize their reserve balances to offset the proposed cuts.

Source: www.governorbarbour.com

A Social-Program Panel—Cutting the Federal Deficit

Senators Kent Conrad (D-ND), chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, and Judd Gregg (R-NH), ranking Republican on the Committee, have joined forces to propose that Congress set up a Fiscal Task Force to tackle the deficit and debt. According to senator Conrad, “*nothing short of the economic future of our nation is at stake. We face a perfect storm of exploding debt, brought on by rising health costs, a retiring baby boom generation,*

and an outdated and inefficient revenue system. Now is the time to act. And I believe that a special process is absolutely necessary to secure our economic future.” The proposal would establish an 18-member bi-partisan task force to address the nation’s long term

To get more information about this proposal, go to <http://conrad.senate.gov>

budget crisis. The panel would develop recommendations for entitlement programs that would be voted on by Congress without going through the committee process, without amendments and without using delaying tactics. Fourteen of the 18 members would have to agree on the recommendations before they would be considered under this process. The proposal represents a major change in how Congress does business.

Children’s Advocates Pushing for FY 2011 Increases

An early learning coalition in Washington D.C. that includes NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and NAC-CRRA (National Association for Child Care Resource Referral Agencies) is pushing an agenda to increase the investment in children’s programs in the FY 2011 federal budget.

Advocates are asking that President Obama provide the following in his FY

2011 budget request:

- \$3.7 billion increase for the Child Care & Development Block Grant
- \$3.7 billion increase for Head Start and Early Head Start
- \$400 million increase for IDEA Preschool
- \$500 million increase for infants and toddlers with disabilities and special needs.

The President will submit his budget to Congress in February 2010;

The President’s budget sends a signal to Congress on what should be the top investments in next year’s budget cycle—ultimately setting the blueprint for what gets in next year’s federal budget.

Sources: NAEYC Children’s Champion ALERT, December 9, 2009/ NACCRRRA Capitol Connection, December 8, 2009

Early Education and The Generals: Unexpected Supporters

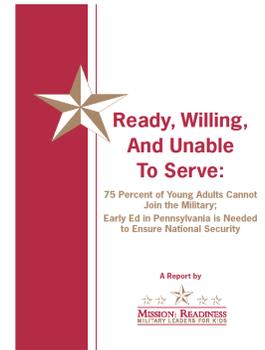
Early childhood education supporters received an unexpected boost in Pennsylvania from a group called **Mission: Readiness/Military Leaders for Kids**. This group is a non-profit, bi-partisan organization of senior retired military leaders who are calling for “smart investments in the next generation of American children.”

The report, entitled *Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve*, points out that the military estimates that approximately 75% of all young adults ages 17-24 in America are unable to join the military. As stated by Henry Shelton, General, US

Army (Ret.), Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: *“Our men and women in uniform are the best in the world. But the sophistication of our military is increasing every year so we will soon need even better qualified recruits. Unfortunately, the number of young Americans who have high-school degrees, are in good physical shape, and are without criminal records is declining. To keep our country strong and safe, we need to ensure that all young Americans get the right start in life—we need more investments in high-quality early education.*”

The report concludes that early education is an investment in national security and America’s military readiness depends on the ability of the upcoming generation to serve.

For a copy of the report, go to:



www.missionreadiness.org

Kentucky Report Touts Value of Preschool

On December 4, 2009, the Kentucky Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence issued a cost-benefit analysis of pre-K that estimated a \$1 to \$5 rate of return for investing in pre-K. The analysis was prepared by the University of Kentucky Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER). The Strong Start Coalition, an initiative of the Prichard Committee, advocates making the pre-K program available to

all 3 and 4-year-old children over time, beginning with families whose incomes

“We think it is important that our elected officials and policy leaders have information about the strong return on investment that pre-K delivers to make sure those programs aren’t cut.”

Kevin Hable, Chair, Business Leadership Council

are 200% percent of poverty. Expanding the program would serve an additional 16,000 children at a cost of \$73 million per year.

The release of this report coincided with a proposal by the Kentucky Department of Education to cut pre-K as one way to address the looming budget deficit. Source: Press Release, December 4, 2009, www.prichardcommittee.org

Child Care Protection Act of 2009 Introduced

On December 17, 2009, Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) introduced the *Child Care Protection Act of 2009*, S. 2903.

This legislation will require comprehensive background checks for child care providers including state and federal fingerprint checks, sex offender registry checks and a check of child abuse and neglect registries for all licensed, regulated and registered child care provid-

ers. Currently, each state makes a decision about the type of background checks that are required for persons working in child care and not all states require a comprehensive background check. As of December 2008, only 25 states conducted a state and federal fingerprint check and only 15 states required a



Senator Richard Burr
North Carolina

check of the sex offender registry. Under this legislation, all states would be required to complete comprehensive checks and to repeat those checks every 5 years. “This bill will reassure parents that their children are being taken care of by qualified individuals in a safe environment.” Source: www.burr.senate.gov

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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.

National PTA Develops Common Core State Standard Campaign

The National PTA is developing a campaign to support the development of common core learning standards.

The Common Core Standards Initiative is "designed to improve educational outcomes for students by developing a set of common, voluntary, internationally benchmarked K-12 standards for college and career readiness in English language arts and mathematics. Common core state standards are a first step to leveling the playing field for the nation's students by increasing rigor in underperforming schools and setting equal expectations for what all students will need to know and be able to do once they graduate from high

school."

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has provided a \$1 million grant to the National PTA to develop a campaign to build support among a potentially important constituency: parents.

"As the largest volunteer child advocacy organization with membership of over 5 million parents, families, students, and teachers, PTA is positioned to be an influential, credible, non-partisan voice in the initiative. The Initiative is well aligned with PTA's public policy priority of equity and opportunity for all children. Parents have a critical role to play in the adoption and implementation of common standards, as they

are their child's first advocate and have the best interests of their child as a goal."

PTA intends to support two goals:

1. States adopt or prioritize the common standards and hold school districts in their state accountable for implementing the standards.
2. School districts implement the standards and hold the schools in their district accountable for implementing the standards.

Three SECA states, **Florida, Georgia and North Carolina**, will be pilot states for the PTA advocacy campaign. For more information go to:

www.pta.org