

Washington Update

109th Congress Convenes: Ambitious Agenda Ahead

The first session of the 109th Congress has convened and a very busy year is expected. This includes completion of several significant reauthorizations not completed by the last Congress. These measures, very important to young children and their families, include the Head Start Act, the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (CCBDG/TANF) and the Higher Education Act. In addition, the Congress is expected to address taxes, social security, tort reform, Medicare and Medicaid as well as other major domestic and international initiatives.

One of the most important and difficult activities of the Congress this year will be the development of the 2006 budget and the determination of funding levels for federal programs through the appropriations process. The President initiates the 2006 fiscal process by introducing his budget request on February 7, 2005. Most agree that the rising federal deficit is a major factor in this year's process that must be completed by September 30, 2005. Many advocates are increasingly worried about cuts to federal funding in 2006.

Beginning in March, the House and Senate Budget Committees develop separate versions of the FY 2006 budget. The reconciled House-Senate Budget resolution does not have to be signed by the President. This Congressional Budget sets spending guidelines for appropriations committees that must be followed when funding levels for individual programs are established.

Many advocates predict this year's process to be very difficult for domestic programs. This year's Congressional budget may include reconciliation instructions to authorizing committees requiring them to identify potential changes in federal law to allow cuts in entitlement programs. Advocates caution that a number of strategies for spending cuts are possible this year including overall caps in entitlement programs such as Medicaid, TANF, child care, SCHIP; caps in all discretionary spending; and/or potential block grants.

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New Senate HELP Committee Chair Announced

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee has announced a new Chair of the Committee, Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY). Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), remains the Ranking Member of the Committee. The Senate HELP Committee has jurisdiction over IDEA, Head Start and many other health and education programs.

Republicans on the Committee are:

Senator Judd Gregg (NH), Senator Bill Frist (TN), Senator Lamar Alexander (TN), Senator Richard Burr (NC), Senator Johnny Isakson (GA), Senator Mike DeWine (OH), Senator John Ensign (NV), Senator Orrin Hatch (UT), Senator Jeff Sessions (AL), Senator Pat Roberts (KS)

Democrats on the Committee are:

Senator Christopher Dodd (CT), Senator Tom Harkin (IA), Senator Barbara Mikulski (MD), Senator Jeff Bingaman (NM), Senator Patty Murray (WA), Senator Jack Reed (RI), Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (NY).

Senator James Jeffords (VT) is the only Independent on the Committee.



Agenda, continued

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ITCA will keep you informed about progress on the 2006 federal budget and will continue to work closely with other associations to advocate for increases in Part C of IDEA and other important federal programs.

Department of Education Holds IDEA Public Input Meetings

The U.S. Department of Education has announced a series of meetings across the country to receive public comments and recommendations on regulations for the new IDEA. Anyone wanting to speak will be given about 2 or 3 minutes in a town-hall style meeting. It is recommended that comments be submitted in writing as well as verbally.

The first public meeting will be held Friday, January 28, 2005, from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM and from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware. The address for this meeting is:
University of Delaware, University of Delaware Conference Center
John M. Clayton Hall, Room 106100
Pencader Way, Newark, DE 19716

The second public meeting will be held Thursday, February 3, 2005, from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM and from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The address for this meeting is:
Ohio State University, School of Education
384 Arps Hall, 1945 North High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43210

The third public meeting will be held February 7, 2005, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM and from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at Sheraton Boston Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts. The address for this meeting is:
Sheraton Boston Hotel, Prudential Center
39 Dalton Street
Boston, MA 02199

The fourth public meeting will be held February 11, 2005, from 1:00 PM to 5:30 PM and from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM at the Lindbergh Schweitzer Elementary School in San Diego, California. The address for this meeting is: San Diego City Schools
Lindbergh Schweitzer Elementary School, Schweitzer Campus
6911 Balboa Avenue
San Diego, CA 92111

Additional meetings will be in Atlanta, GA, February 15, Laramie, WY, February 18 and Washington, DC, February 24. More details on sites and times will be forthcoming from the Department. ITCA would like to have representation at as many of these events as possible. If you can attend and make comments for ITCA, please contact Ron Benham, Chair of the Legislative Committee at ron.benham@state.ma.us. ITCA can assist in preparing remarks for these hearings.

For additional information: contact Ron Benham, Chair of the Legislative Committee at ron.benham@state.ma.us or Sharon Walsh, ITCA Governmental Relations at walshtaylor@aol.com