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The following memo provides a summary of recent developments in public policy issues of interest to Early Childhood advocates.

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### **This Week in Washington**

Capitol Hill has been consumed by frenzy in recent days as hearings, reporters, press conferences and constituent are seemingly in every hall, office and Committee room. The frenzy spread to education issues with Secretary of Education Arne Duncan appearing before the House Budget Committee last week and the House Education and Labor Committee today.

Secretary Duncan spent over two hours with the House Budget Committee last Thursday, and he faced a number of questions about the Department's spending and reform plans. Areas of concern included the appropriate balance between federal and local policy decisions; how states will deal with the "funding cliff" they will face after all of the stimulus money is disbursed; and, whether some of the proposed program consolidations would dilute the intentions of the underlying programs. As early childhood advocates know, one such program proposed for consolidation in the President's FY 2011 Budget proposal are Parent Information Resource Centers.

Secretary Duncan then appeared before the House Education and Labor Committee today and talked broadly about education policy plans in K-12 and higher education, and is scheduled to appear before the Senate and House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittees on March 17 and 18, respectively. He will surely face additional questions about the Administration's plans for reauthorizing ESEA; funding issues states and districts will face after the stimulus funding is spent; and how his vision for K-12 education reform and significant changes to higher education programs will be affected if Congress fails to pass a new version of ESEA or the stalled Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act legislation.

### **Health Care Reform**

As anyone who reads the paper knows, health care reform is dominating the pundit airwaves in the wake of last week's bicameral, bipartisan health care summit hosted by the White House. The meeting, which lasted nearly seven hours, was billed by the President as a forum for all parties to bring their ideas on health care reform to the table. Others claim it was nothing more than "political theater." Congressional Republicans began the meeting by urging the President to scrap his plans for overhauling the U.S. health care system and restart the debate on how best to control medical costs and expand coverage. "Our view, with all respect, is that this is a car that

can't be recalled or fixed, and that we ought to start over," said Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN). While there were moments of pointed exchange throughout the debate, the President stressed areas where the sides agree, such as the need for new insurance regulations. In the end, there was no consensus, and the President and Congressional leadership seem determined to pursue health care reform using the reconciliation legislation that only needs a simple majority to win passage.

Despite intentions to use what Republicans are calling the "nuclear option" to move health care, the President's proposal released today incorporated a handful of Republican ideas discussed at the meeting. Republican Eric Cantor (D-VA) was quoted in the *Washington Post* saying, "If the President simply adds a couple of Republican solutions to a trillion dollar health care package that the American people don't support, it isn't bipartisanship. It's political cover." There are others who share this sentiment. According to reports, the President's proposal was widely viewed as a strategy to give the appearance to Democrats and others that they have attempted to craft a bipartisan bill, clearing the path for them to get the bill passed with only Democratic support. The likely path forward on health care reform will involve the House first considering (and presumably passing) the overhaul bill the Senate approved in December. The likely next step will then be using a reconciliation bill to pass a package of changes to that bill in the Senate. Enacting health care reform will be a complicated, multi-step strategy. With the President calling for swift action and an up or down vote on health care, this is encouraging news for early childhood stakeholders given the inclusion of funding for home visitation programs in the Senate-passed bill.

### **First Focus Holds Briefing on Federal Investments in Children**

On February 26, 2010, First Focus held a briefing to discuss how federal programs that improve the lives of America's children's are faring in comparison to all other programs in the federal budget. The briefing included a presentation of *Kids' Share: An Analysis of Federal Expenditures on Children Through 2008*, the organization's third annual examination of federal spending trends and tax policies that support and impact children and families. The report presents findings on expenditures in 2008 on children, historic trends across the budget, historic trends within children's expenditures and projections through 2019. Julia Isaacs, a co-author of the report and Child & Family Policy Fellow at the Brookings Institution, noted that less than one-tenth of the federal budget was spent on children in 2008—\$295 billion out of a total of \$2.983 trillion in outlays. In addition, since 1960, the children's share of the federal budget has diminished by a quarter, while spending on the non-child portions of entitlement programs has more than doubled. Isaacs also observed that federal outlays on children were up in 2008 and will rise further in 2009 and 2010, but then will fall back below 2 percent of GDP over the next decade, after the expiration of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). With regard to federal funding for children in the immediate future, First Focus also provided at the briefing a "first look" of how children would fare under the President's FY 2011 Budget request. First Focus asserts that children would receive a raw increase of \$20.55 billion over last year's levels and total spending on children is up 9.86 percent over FY 2010 levels. To access the *Kids' Share: An Analysis of Federal Expenditures on Children Through 2008*, visit <http://www.firstfocus.net/pages/3654>.

### **National Council of La Raza Releases Report on Early Learning Systems**

Last week, the National Council of La Raza released a white paper titled, "Responding to the Needs of Young Latino Children: State Efforts to Build Comprehensive Early Learning Systems." Recent policy developments and investments in early care and education reflect a

renewed commitment to improving the school readiness and, ultimately, the school success of young children. National Council of La Raza notes there is a prime opportunity to incentivize states to design early learning systems that meet the needs of Latino children. Latino children now constitute almost one-quarter (24%) of the child population in the United States under the age of five, and are the fastest-growing subgroup of children. Despite these demographics, Hispanic children have the least access to formal early care and education programs and low levels of school readiness. The white paper examines how states are working to build comprehensive early learning standards and to address issues of professional development to ensure the success of Latino and English language learner children and families. However, the report found that states have a long way to go to develop early learning programs that are responsive to the needs of Latino and English language learner children and families. Accordingly, National Council of La Raza makes the following recommendations for State Advisory Councils to improve early learning systems: 1) engage ELL experts and the Latino community to improve early learning standards; 2) use Council workgroups to examine and make recommendations for standards; 3) establish a strong infrastructure in states for effective ELL instruction; 4) develop career ladder programs that attract and retain culturally and linguistically diverse educators; 5) partner with institutions of higher education to develop innovative coursework. To view the white paper, visit <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/61855/>.

### **Flurry of ARRA-Related Announcements Expected**

U.S. Department of Education (ED) officials are indicating that the first round of winners of Race to the Top awards could be announced in the next few weeks. In fact, it is expected that as early as tomorrow ED will announce the Race to the Top finalists and non-finalists. Staff is warning the forty-one applicants that there will be “very few” winners in this first round of awards. That will leave the would-be losers deciding whether to apply again for the second phase of awards. Related to other America Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) programs, the Department of Education released last Friday proposed guidance for the Teacher Incentive Fund program (<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-3963.pdf>), and invited interested parties to comment on the guidance by March 29, 2010. The early childhood community is still anxiously awaiting the final guidance and application for the Investing in Innovation (i3) program. Staff indicates its release is imminent. In the meantime, ED has set up the virtual space it said it would to allow the sharing of innovative ideas. To learn more about the “Innovation Portal”, visit <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/02/new-open-innovation-portal-awaits-ideas/>