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

Budget and Appropriations

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate adopted an Omnibus spending plan for FY 2010 last week, which included appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. Of importance to early childhood advocates, the funding levels for early childhood programs in the Omnibus bill remain unchanged from those reported last week. Currently, the spending package, which includes funding for all remaining FY 2010 appropriation bills (except the Defense bill) awaits the signature of the President which is the final step in the appropriations process.

With the end of session in sight, House members continued work this week on a number of key bills. Not the least of which was H.R. 2847, the “Jobs for Main Street Act,” which was revealed late Tuesday evening. The measure contains \$75 billion for job creation, including approximately \$48 billion for infrastructure projects and \$27 billion for state and local governments to create and save jobs.

An early holiday present for education advocates came in the form of news that of the \$27 billion to create and save jobs, \$23 billion will be for the Education Jobs Fund. The fund will help States support an estimated 250,000 education jobs over the next two years. Specifically, 95% of the funds will be allocated by States to school districts and public institutions of higher education to retain or create jobs to provide educational services, including early childhood education services. Funds can also be used to modernize, renovate, and repair public education facilities. The remaining 5% of funds is reserved for State education-related jobs and administration of the Education Jobs Fund.

While the news that the House is expected to pass the “Jobs” bill this evening is reason for holiday cheer, the Senate is not expected to act on a bill until Congress returns in January.

Healthcare Reform

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)'s effort to get health care reform legislation through the Senate before the holidays has run into hurdles on and off the floor this week. The week began with the news that Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) would not support

compromise legislation that no longer included a public option, but would expand health care access to allow individuals 55 to 64 years old to buy in to Medicare. Given that Democrats need every possible Independent and Democrat vote to reach the 60 vote threshold needed for passage, it was back to the drawing board for Democrats.

With time running out for debate before the holidays, key Senators were summoned to the White House to broker a proposal that would lead to passage of health care reform legislation. Following the high level meeting, Senator Lieberman indicated Tuesday that he is ready to give Senate Democrats the 60th vote needed to pass a stripped-down health care overhaul bill. According to *CQ*, Lieberman said, “that if a government-run “public option” is out and Democrats drop a Medicare buy-in plan for people ages 55-64, and if there are no attempts to add other alternatives of that type, then I’m getting toward that position where I can say what I’ve wanted to say all along, that I’m ready to vote for health care reform.”

However, Democrats shouldn’t break out the egg nog in celebration just yet. Today, brought Senate consideration of health care reform legislation to a glacier pace with Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) forcing the reading of a 767-page amendment. While the amendment has been pulled, further efforts to force a reading of a manager's amendment could doom Reid's timetable for passage before the holidays. The reading of any major amendment could delay the filing of three required motions to cut off debate threatening Democratic plans to hold a final vote on the bill December 23rd or Dec. 24th. All eyes will be on the Senate next week with many wondering if the debate on health care will still be underway or if not a creature will be stirring in the Capitol come Christmas Eve.

ED Hosts Final ESEA Forum on College and Career Readiness

Last week, the Department of Education (ED) hosted its fifth, and final, forum on the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The topic for this meeting was "College- and Career-Ready Graduates". Under Secretary Martha Kanter reminded the audience that ED aims to learn from the experiences of teachers, students, parents, school leaders, community organizations and policymakers and to incorporate lessons learned, new research and best practices into a newly reconstituted ESEA. In regards to the topic of the forum, she pointed to the President’s American Graduation Initiative and the goals of the House-passed reconciliation bills as steps toward Administration goals. She also spoke to the urgency of efforts to close the achievement gap, and cited Secretary Duncan’s goal of being “tight on goals and loose on the means” while implementing state-developed standards that truly educate students and prepare them for college and the workforce. Invited speakers discussed the importance of building K-12 systems that consider the needs of their many consumers—students, parents, business, communities, etc., as well as the crucial nature of data and research in these efforts. The audience was invited to offer comments and pose questions to the panel. A broad range of topics was covered, including the need for real parental involvement and the need to focus on partnerships with other agencies such as the Department of Labor as it prepares for the upcoming reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act. Transcripts and some videos of these sessions can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/news/events/forum.html>. Stakeholders are also invited to submit comments to inform reauthorization to ESEA.Comments@ed.gov.

PTA Releases a Report on Family Engagement

A new publication from the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provides key facts, background, analysis, noteworthy statutes, and policy recommendations for state PTAs and other family and child advocates for crafting successful school-family engagement legislation at the state level. The reference guide provides information on family engagement provisions within state education laws, so that families can better advocate for their children's education on the school and district levels. It also guides policymaker and advocate development of legislative reform initiatives, as well as efforts to monitor implementation of laws.

Research shows compelling evidence that children benefit from family engagement in their schools, and that family engagement helps close educational gaps between children from different racial groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. "These are exciting times for the field of family and community engagement, given the renewed emphasis on shared responsibility in uplifting our nation's education system and standing in the global community," wrote the report authors. "The time is now to advocate for bold policy reforms that support the advancement of systemic family engagement initiatives in all of our schools." In their view, implementation of state policies at the local school level is a critical component of achieving greater family engagement in education. To read the full report, visit <http://www.pta.org/3717.asp>

New America Foundation Identifies NJ as Model for Pre-K-3rd Education

A new report from the New America Foundation finds that New Jersey has made tremendous strides in improving children's access to quality early learning experiences, enabling some districts to nearly erase the achievement gap. As a result of a 1998 state Supreme Court ruling, New Jersey has implemented one of the nation's highest quality state Pre-K programs. The report titled, "Education Reform Starts Early: Lessons from New Jersey's Pre-K-3rd Reform," provides a blueprint for how to create a high-quality, well-aligned education system that helps children sustain their learning gains up through the third grade and beyond.

Research shows that children participating in the New Jersey Pre-K programs make significant gains in language, emerging literacy, and other skills. Equally important, New Jersey has taken steps to link Pre-K programs to the early elementary grades, enabling children to acquire a solid foundation of reading, math, and social skills by the end of third grade. While the report describes how New Jersey became a national leader in early education and Pre-K-3rd reform, it also identifies challenges that could threaten the state's continued success. Specifically, the report recommends that state and national policymakers: 1) integrate Pre-K and other early childhood investments into a broader education reform agenda to improve student learning outcomes from preschool through college; 2) invest in building state-level infrastructure for pre-K, not just expanding slots; and 3) create systems of data collection, analysis, and accountability to drive ongoing quality improvement in early childhood and Pre-K-3rd programs. To read the full report, visit http://www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/education_reform_starts_early_0.