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

This Week in Washington

The only term to describe accurately Washington, D.C. this week is Snowmageddon. As the Washington D.C. area copes with the latest storm in a winter that has set the record for largest snowfall totals, the federal government remained closed for the third day in a row. Earlier this week, leaders announced that the House of Representatives would not reconvene for legislative business due to the inclement weather until February 22nd—after the scheduled President’s recess. However, the Senate is expected to move forward with a session on Thursday despite the blizzard blanketing the Washington area. No votes are scheduled on Thursday, but Democrats still plan to hold their weekly caucus lunch, which was rescheduled from Tuesday. Democrats at the lunch are expected to talk about moving a jobs package. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) had hoped the Senate would act before the end of the week on the first of the jobs bills, because the Senate will be adjourned next week for the President’s Day recess. The delay will put off the jobs package until later this month.

Of importance to early childhood advocates is also the delay in consideration of the President’s FY 2011 Budget request. Hearings to examine the President’s FY 2011 Education and Health and Human Services budget were postponed in the House this week and will likely be rescheduled later this month. While hearings have been delayed, reaction to the President’s FY 2011 budget has become more clear this week. The education budget met muted support among early childhood advocates. While thrilled by the new spending—as much as \$3 billion—the budget request also contained significant proposed program consolidations and eliminations that generally fall to authorizing, not appropriating, committees of the Congress. Impatient to erase No Child Left Behind from the policy books, President Obama offered a budget based on his vision for education reform rather than a funding scheme for programs currently authorized. Early education stakeholders were also disappointed that all of the proposed funding increases would be dedicated to new Administration initiatives that have not been implemented or enacted, versus increased investments in high priority and long standing programs such as Title I and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) which have been traditional sources of funding for early childhood initiatives. The big winners included Race to the Top, the Investing in Innovation Fund and School Improvement Grants.

Additionally many advocates expressed concern that “consolidations” equal block grants—a strategy for funding education that has led to declining federal investments in the past. One program that is proposed for consolidation is the Parent Information and Resource Centers. Another element of the Obama plan that is troubling to some, and exciting to others, is a proposal to convert formula grant funding streams to competitive programming. While there may be support for the goals and structure reflected in this budget plan, the job of rewriting the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in cooperation with the Administration, falls to the Congress. Attempting essentially to amend a large and complicated bill through the appropriations process is an enormous challenge at best, and one that is bound to meet strong resistance along the way. A framework providing greater detail of the plan hinted at in the budget request is anticipated in March, which will make clear if the Administration will support additional resources under the ESEA for early childhood activities.

Health Care Reform

President Barack Obama began the week by making a renewed push to pass health care reform legislation. On Sunday, the President proposed holding a bipartisan, bicameral health care summit on February 25, 2010. In an interview on CBS during the Super Bowl pre-game show, Obama said he hoped to review proposals in Senate- and House-passed health plans, as well as those offered by Republican members. “I want to ask them to put their ideas on the table, and then after the recess, which will be a few weeks away, I want to come back and have a large meeting, the Republicans and Democrats, to go through systematically all the best ideas that are out there and move it forward,” Obama said. Democrats have been struggling to find a way to move the Senate-passed bill through the House, along with a package of yet-to-be-determined compromises that would guarantee that House Democrats would support the effort.

The President reiterated his commitment to health care reform during a surprise visit to the White House briefing room following a meeting with congressional leaders from both parties. According to CQ, he said that he is prepared to cut deals with Republicans in order to create jobs and improve the nation’s health care system. “I’m willing to move off of some of the preferences of my party in order to meet them halfway, but there’s got to be some give from their side as well,” Obama said. “I also won’t hesitate to condemn what I consider to be obstinacy,” he warned. Obama’s call for a summit makes it less likely that a compromise will be struck before March, but it is encouraging for early childhood advocates who continue to support funding for a new home visitation program.

Early Learning Challenge Fund Request Relies on SAFRA

Much like the President’s budget request for elementary education programs, the proposal for the Early Learning Challenge Fund is based on a number of would-be program changes. For early learning, many of these changes would be included in the pending *Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act* (HR 3221). Budget summary documents say, “This pending legislation would implement significant portions of President Obama’s plan to make changes in Federal postsecondary student loan programs, resulting in dramatic savings that can be reinvested in a variety of crucial education programs benefiting students, families, and schools.” The budget proposal specifically mentions the programs that would be supported by the budget savings from the proposed complete conversion from the Federal Family Education Loan program to the Direct Loan program, including the Early Learning Challenge Fund. The

early childhood community is quietly appreciative of the budget proposal, although there are many questions about the prospects for the Fund if the pending student aid bill is not enacted, or takes on a direction different from what the Administration prefers. Congressional staff indicate that Senate action on its version of SAFRA would not come any earlier than late February, and others suggest it could be well into spring before the bill is debated, given the Senate's current focus on jobs legislation.

First Lady Launches Let's Move

On Tuesday, First Lady Michelle Obama announced an ambitious national goal of solving the challenge of childhood obesity within a generation so that children born today will reach adulthood at a healthy weight and unveiled a nationwide campaign – Let's Move – to help achieve it. The Let's Move campaign will combat the epidemic of childhood obesity through a comprehensive approach that builds on effective strategies, and mobilizes public and private sector resources. Let's Move will engage every sector impacting the health of children to achieve the national goal, and will provide schools, families and communities simple tools to help kids be more active, eat better, and get healthy. To support Let's Move and facilitate and coordinate partnerships with States, communities, and the non-profit and for-profit private sectors, the nation's leading children's health foundations have come together to create a new independent foundation – the Partnership for a Healthier America – which will accelerate existing efforts addressing childhood obesity and facilitate new commitments towards the national goal of solving childhood obesity within a generation. “The physical and emotional health of an entire generation and the economic health and security of our nation is at stake,” said Mrs. Obama. “This isn't the kind of problem that can be solved overnight, but with everyone working together, it can be solved. So, let's move.” President Barack Obama kicked off the launch by signing a Presidential Memorandum creating the first ever Task Force on Childhood Obesity. Within 90 days, the Task Force will conduct a review of every program and policy relating to child nutrition and physical activity and develop a national action plan that maximizes federal resources and sets concrete benchmarks toward the First Lady's national goal. For additional information visit, <http://www.letsmove.gov/>.

ED Shares RTTT Procedures and Applications

The Department of Education received 41 applications for the first phase of the Race to the Top process and is making efforts to maintain transparency in the review and award process. The Department has a blog entry on its website (<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2010/01/race-to-the-top-%E2%80%93integrity-and-transparency-drive-the-process/>) that explains how the process works, including information on the points system, the peer review process and finalist presentations. Also, the Department is sharing applications it received from states applying for Race to the Top at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase1-applications/>. In order to make the information available to the public as quickly as possible, while fulfilling the legal obligation to protect certain information, including personal information that may have been included, the Department will be posting the applications in stages. Right now, states' narrative responses are available, although some states have already posted entire applications on their own websites. ED is reviewing the remaining portions of the applications—the appendices—and intends to post them in the coming weeks.