

The Education Report

A weekly report of public policy issues in American Education from

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1. Continuing Resolution Update and a Legislative To-Do List for 108th Congress

When Congress returns to Washington in January 2003, to kick off the 108th Congress, the legislative to-do list will be complicated by several pieces of important unfinished business. Though a lame duck session is likely during the first two weeks in December, it is unlikely that it will be very productive. Topping this “to-do” list are 11 of the 13 appropriations bills that fund all the agencies of the government. Since October 1 a “continuing resolution” (CR) has provided funding at the same rate as the previous year, making sure critical government services continue as well as thousands of programmatic functions.

The CR expires on November 22nd, necessitating reelected and defeated Members of the House and Senate to return to Washington for several days in mid-November. At that time they will attempt to find agreement for some of these bills. It is anticipated that they will extend the life of the CR until the first of December, when a 2-week lameduck session will begin. If that 2-week effort is not productive, Congress will formally adjourn for the holidays and return once again in late January. At that time negotiations will restart on the unresolved FY 2003 appropriations bills, while at the same time the President prepares his budget for FY 2004. That document is due before the Congress in early February.

Other legislation that was due for reauthorization during the 107th Congress but will be carried over to 2003 includes the following:

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Early in his Administration, President Bush appointed a Commission to investigate the status of IDEA. The issues of concern were over identification of minority students; the relationship between poor reading instruction and over-identification of students with learning disabilities as eligible for special education services; the paper work burden imposed by IDEA regulations; the issue of dual disciplinary standards for general and special education students; and how best to improve funding of IDEA. A report was issued, many hearings were held by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the House Education and the Workforce Committee. Staff met continuously and consulted with outside groups in an effort to draft a reauthorization proposal that would address these concerns and have bi-partisan support. In spite of their best effort, no bills were introduced. It is anticipated that both the House and Senate will have reauthorization proposals prepared for introduction early in the next Congress.

Libraries and Museum Services Reauthorization bill:

Legislation reauthorizing the Library Services and the Institute for Museum Services Programs was drafted, debated and very close to passage in mid-October. This legislation provides formula grant funding to states to support and expand library services throughout the country, as well as support for research libraries at institutions of higher education. The Institute for Museum Services provides grants to local museums for several purposes. Questions were raised by the republican leadership in the House regarding the recipients of several of these sub grants and the content of the programs they sponsored. As a result, the conference agreement was rejected at the 11th hour.

National Science Foundation Doubling Act:

This proposal to double funding for the National Science Foundation over the next 5 years; to authorize a popular new initiative titled "Teach Talent"; and to expand NSF support for high-quality math and science professional development efforts was similarly scratched at the 11th hour because of Administration (OMB) concerns about cost and a 5 year program extension authorized by the legislation.

Welfare Reform:

After months of oversight hearings and action by several Committees in the House and Senate, agreement remained illusive for a comprehensive welfare reform bill. Definitions about appropriate work requirements and funding for childcare and other critical programs appeared to be the most contentious issues yet to be resolved.

In every instance these are popular proposals where the Congress made serious efforts to resolve differences and find common ground with the Administration. This failure to act puts into sharp focus the challenges created by a narrow margin to determine the party that controls the congressional agenda and a wide philosophical divide between democrats and republicans. The elections on Tuesday offer the opportunity to break this logjam. Unfortunately, few people expect the outcome to do little more than confirm the divided views of the electorate.

2. Tuesday Election Outcome Too Close To Call

The equally divided electorate that handed George Bush the Presidency, remains similarly positioned as the November 5th mid-term election date approaches. Twenty House races and between 10-12 Senate races remain “too close to call”. Everyone is guessing about outcomes but no one is confident whether control of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives will remain in the same hands with narrower margins or the party leadership will change. Adding to the list of “guessers” is Washington Partners. We think the Senate races you should keep your eye on, and our predictions about outcomes, include the following:

New Hampshire

*Shaheen (D) vs Sununu (R)

Georgia

*Cleland (D) vs Chambliss (R)

Colorado

*Strickland(D) vs Allard (R)

Missouri

Carnahan (D) vs *Talent (R)

Texas

*Coryn (R) vs Kirk (D)

North Carolina

*Dole (R) vs Bowles (D)

Minnesota

*Mondale (D) vs Coleman (R)

Iowa

*Harkin (D) vs Ganske (R)

Maine

*Collins (R) vs Pingree (D)

Louisiana

*Landrieu (D) vs 4 Republicans

Arkansas

*Pryor (D) vs Hutchinson (R)

South Dakota

*Johnson (D) vs Thune (R)

There are too many House raises in contention to describe at length. The ones to watch are where incumbents are pitted against one another because of re-districting, plus the race between Connie Morella (R-MD) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD); and Jill Long Thompson (D-IN) and Chris Chocola (R-IN) Though a switch in leadership is possible, a more likely outcome is that the Democrats pick up 1 or 2 seats but the Republicans retain control. In other words, gridlock stands a chance of getting worse, not better.

3. Nonpartisan Group Proposes Guidelines to Improve Teacher Quality: NCLB “Highly Qualified Teacher” Provision Considered a Contentious Issue By Many

On Wednesday, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) released criteria to the states to meet the No Child Left Behind Act “highly qualified teacher” provisions. In a letter accompanying the suggestions, NCTAF echoed the sentiments expressed in a letter sent to states last week by Secretary Paige, urging states not to compromise teacher quality in order to meet the new NCLB standards.

Under No Child Left Behind, all “highly qualified” teachers must have a bachelor’s degree. In addition, elementary school teachers need to pass a curricular test that covers reading, math, as well as additional classroom subject matter; middle and high school teachers are required to prove their competency in a particular subject area by means of their college major, graduate studies, or by taking a challenging state test.

The NCTAF “highly qualified” teacher criteria for states suggest that prospective teachers not only demonstrate solid, core knowledge of their chosen subject, but that they do the following as well:

1. Utilize technology in their classrooms;
2. Foster a positive learning environment;
3. Grasp how students in their classrooms learn most effectively;
4. Rely on numerous and varied assessment tools to measure progress;
5. Learn continuously as a teacher;

The NCTAF suggestions come on the heels of a sharply worded letter sent to the states last week warning them not to lower standards in order to meet the NCLB requirements. However, the line between lowering standards and eradicating barriers to the teaching profession is narrow, and one that many feel need to be examined closely in light of the nation’s teacher shortage.

To view the NCTAF criteria, go to <http://www.nctaf.org>. To view a relevant opinion paper by the Progressive Policy Institute’s Frederick M. Hess titled “Tear Down this Wall: The Case for a Radical Overhaul of Teacher Certification,” go to http://www.ppionline.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgAreaID=110&subsecID=135&contentID=3964

4. Office of the Education Deputy Secretary Releases Guide to Education Funding

Late last week, Education Deputy Secretary Bill Hansen made public a new guide to the Bush administration's education funding. The report, titled *Resources + Reforms = Results: President Bush's Commitment to Our Nation's School Children*, was published to help explain the administration's financial pledge to fund the No Child Left Behind Act.

The report draws attention to the substantial increase in overall education funding that has been authorized by the Bush administration, highlighting the fact that the President's FY03 requested increase for the Department of Education with mark a \$15 billion (41%) increase since FY 2000.

The 14-page report was prepared by the Office of the Deputy Secretary, and it is available on-line at <http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/10-2002/10242002.html> .

5. NCES Releases On-line Education Funding Report

The National Center for Education Statistics released Thursday a report titled "Federal Support for Education: Fiscal Years 1980 to 2002" that tries to paint a comprehensive picture of the federal financial support of education, beginning with FY 1980 and up through FY 2002. The report is available only online, and it may be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003006>.