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

Student Aid Reform

The fate of the healthcare debate continues to set the stage for all other legislative considerations that the Congress must face before the holiday recess, scheduled to begin December 18. The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee has yet to introduce its version of reconciliation legislation. The House passed its bill, H.R. 3221, the “Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act”, months ago.

The HELP Committee continues to negotiate the content of its mandatory save and spend proposal that is estimated at \$87 billion among its members and various education stakeholders. While portions of the draft bill have been shared with advocates, when asked about a mark-up date, Senate staffers continue to say “soon”.

The House-passed bill and the Senate draft proposal both provide funding for “Early Learning Challenge Grants,” which are competitive grants to states that challenge them to build comprehensive, high quality learning systems for children from birth to age 5. However, the draft Senate bill proposes investing \$10 billion over 10 years for the new program, versus the \$8 billion over 8 years included in the House-passed bill.

Budget and Appropriations

There has been modest progress toward completion of a FY 2010 federal budget in recent weeks. Of the 12 bills that must be passed, 5 are complete. It was reported that House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI) and Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-HI) met briefly last week to discuss next steps. Inouye would like the Senate to take up the bills individually. Not surprisingly, Congressman Obey is indifferent to Senate procedure and just wants to get the job done.

According to reports this week though, House Democratic leaders are prepared to make a harder push to finish work before the Thanksgiving recess on the remaining appropriations bills, including the FY 2010 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill. It is expected that the House may take up an omnibus package on the floor by the week of November 16th in the hopes of wrapping up the FY10 appropriations process.

In the meantime, Congress has approved a second temporary spending measure to replace the first so-called “continuing resolution” that expired on Halloween. The extension will run through December 18.

Healthcare Reform

Last week, House Democrats lined the steps of the Capitol to unveil a health care reform proposal. While many Members stepped up to the microphone to express support for the proposal, in other corridors and conference rooms, press conferences were held by those Members withholding their votes as they gage constituent support or opposition to the comprehensive and costly legislation. It seems the public option proved to be a curative for some and a poison pill for others.

Early childhood advocates were pleased to learn that the House Democratic Health Care Reform bill maintains funding for a new home visitation program at \$750 million over five years, the same level as the health care bill passed by the House Ways and Means Committee. Additionally, advocates were encouraged that the language creating the home visitation program in the final proposal is identical to the earlier Committee-passed bill. To view the text of the House Health Care Reform Bill and the Manager’s Amendment, visit <http://www.rules.house.gov/>.

The clock is ticking on the House leadership's commitment to a 72-hour public viewing period for the health care reform proposal that will be debated on the floor. Given this timetable, the House is expected to take up consideration of its health care reform proposal shortly. Late this evening, word also came that House Democrats are scrambling to broker last minute compromises as they push for a final vote on health reform legislation by as early as Saturday.

Across the Capitol, Senate leaders were engaged in the same task of crafting a final health care reform proposal, although they are not quite yet ready to reveal their handiwork. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid’s (D-NV) task remains more challenging as several Democrats and moderate Republicans have made it clear that the price for their votes is probably more than he can afford. Not surprisingly, on Tuesday, Senator Reid backed off of a Democratic push to pass a healthcare overhaul this year. "First of all, we're not going to be bound by any timelines," Reid said, refusing to commit to a defined goal date.

Senate Democrats place part of the blame for failing to introduce a Senate proposal on the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), which is charged with determining the bill’s cost. When the CBO does finish its work as early as next week, Senator Reid will need to compile a final bill before sending the measure back for a final CBO score. Between Veterans Day and Thanksgiving, there is little time for floor debate, fueling speculation that the debate will slip possibly into next year.

First Five Year Fund Hosts Briefing

Last Thursday, the First Five Year Fund (FFYF), the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Congressional Asian Pacific America Caucus hosted a briefing on the importance of education services for children from birth to five years of age. The panelists appearing on behalf of the sponsors linked these very early education interventions with high school graduation statistics. Sonya Anderson, National Director of the

First Five Year Fund, moderated the briefing. In her opening remarks, and throughout the session, Dr. Anderson linked the important conversation among the panelists and the audience with the strong support of the FFYF and other early education advocates for inclusion of the Early Learning Challenge Fund in the reconciliation bill now moving through the Congress.

Dr. Robert Pianta, Director of the Center for Advanced Student of Teaching and Learning at the University of Virginia, spoke of strong evidence linking targeted investments in teacher quality and early education programming to future academic success. Dr. Paul Heckman, Co-Director of the educational doctorate program at the Davis Campus of the University of California, reiterated Pianta's views. Dr. Heckman also spoke of the importance of youth engagement and school success, citing in particular the LA's Best Afterschool programs. Representing the South Pacific Asian community was Doua Thor. She spoke about the unique needs of this large, and traditionally underserved, immigrant population. Dr. Jane Gutting, Superintendent of the Yakima, Washington School District, encouraged better preparation and ongoing training for childcare providers, and emphasized the urgency of positive interventions for children from birth to age three when brain development is most critical.

In response to a question from Dr. Anderson about what the federal government can do to promote better and more early education services for this age group, the panelists pointed to better teacher preparation programs; better assessment tools for educators; more slots in existing high quality programs, such as Early Head Start; and, efforts to encourage public schools to embrace responsibility for early education in local communities. More information about birth to five research and services are available at the First Five Years Fund's website at <http://www.ffyf.org>.

CAP Hosts Community Schools Briefing

On October 28th, the Center for American Progress held a briefing titled, "Connecting Schools and Communities to Improve Student Outcomes," to release its new report that features work in England as a model for a nationwide proliferation of community schools. The briefing examined the instrumental role that community partnerships can play in increasing student engagement and achievement. Community schools capitalize on a school's physical space and access to students and families to deliver other services in a central, accessible location. Providing an extended menu of social services, community schools often co-locate Early Head Start, Head Start, pre-school and Medicaid programs creating a potential to improve PreK-3rd alignment and early education opportunities. A highlight of the event was Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's remarks on England's commitment to transforming its 23,000 schools into extended schools (England's term for community schools), which will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. throughout the year, by 2010. "The school should become the center for the support and nurture of the future generation, and a hub for the whole community," said Blair. English schools offer day care, after-school activities, social services and health care. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who joined Prime Minister Blair at the event, launched 21 community schools in 2001 with support from private funders, while he headed up Chicago's schools. Duncan spoke about community schools as a mechanism for increasing parental involvement. For additional information, visit <http://www.americanprogress.org/events/CommunitySchools.html>.

Panel Discussion on Literacy and Early Childhood Education

Recently, Women in Government Relations hosted a panel discussion on literacy and early childhood education. Dr. Jacqueline Jones, the Senior Advisor to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan for Early Learning, participated and discussed the Obama Administration's efforts on early learning outcomes. She emphasized the collaborative nature of the Administration's early learning agenda, which has resulted in a partnership between the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services and the creation of interagency subgroups focusing on such areas as health promotion and family engagement, in addition to assessment and curriculum. She highlighted the goal of the Administration to improve birth to 3rd grade outcomes for all children, especially those at risk, in the areas of health, social, cognitive, and emotional development. According to Jones, one way that the Administration is hoping to accomplish this goal is to ensure that all competitions for funding across the Education Department contain a priority for early learning outcomes, as we have seen recently with the proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund and I3 funds included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Turning to reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Jones noted that the Department is hoping to examine steps that it can take to support early education, such as making it easier to use Title I funds for preschool services.

Following Jones, Paulette Acevedo of the Majority Staff of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee provided brief remarks on the status of the Committee's work, which has been constrained by the continued focus on the health care reform debate. Acevedo discussed the challenges facing the committee to consider a reconciliation bill (including the Early Learning Challenge Fund) and other outstanding authorizations, such as the Child Abuse Prevention Act and the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Lindsay Hunsicker, a Republican staffer for the Senate HELP Committee, then spoke on the minority's perspective with regard to literacy and early childhood education issues. Hunsicker commended advocates and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) for their work on a soon to be introduced comprehensive literacy bill, which will cut across all subject areas in the teaching of literacy. She noted that Senator Enzi (R-WY), who is the Ranking Member of the Senate HELP Committee, supports the idea of linking the teaching of literacy from early childhood through high school as he views literacy as a workforce issue. She went on to acknowledge that states have traditionally been the leaders on early childhood issues and is encouraged by Jones' comments that the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services are working together to create an example on the federal level for early childhood collaboration. The panel discussion concluded with a general recognition that improvements in literacy and early childhood education would continue to be a priority for the Administration and the Senate HELP Committee.