

NEA Federal and State Legislative Update

A weekly review of progress on the Quality Public Schools Agenda and other legislation that impacts our students, classrooms and public education.

Aug. 3, 2007

Congress Adjourns for August Recess. Where Do We Stand?

Congress adjourns at the end of this week for the August recess and will not return to work in Washington, DC, until after Labor Day. In recent months, Congress has taken up a number of bills addressing issues of concern to educators, and, with your help, NEA has secured a number of important victories. Education-related issues will be on the fall congressional agenda.

A. Education Funding – Although Congress has not completed work on an education funding bill for the next fiscal year (begins Oct. 1, 2007), the House of Representatives has passed a bill that would provide significant increases for critical education programs like Title I, special education and Pell Grants. Also, the Senate Appropriations Committee has passed a bill with real increases for education.

status – The full Senate may take up its funding bill after the August recess. The President has threatened to veto any bill that spends more than requested in his budget, as both the House and Senate bill do. It is likely that education funding will be wrapped up in a larger “omnibus” bill at the end of the year, along with any other funding bills that Congress has not finalized. A showdown between Congress and the President is likely later this year.

B. ESEA Reauthorization – Almost 70 bills have been introduced in Congress that would further parts of NEA's Positive Agenda for the ESEA Reauthorization.

status – Congress is expected to start work on a reauthorization bill in the fall.

C. College Affordability – The House and Senate have each passed bills that would make college more affordable by increasing the maximum Pell Grant, capping student loan payments at a manageable percent of income and raising the amount that working students can earn without reducing their financial aid.

status – The bills have moved to a conference committee and reports indicate an agreement may have been reached. The final agreement could go to the House and Senate for passage before they leave for recess.

D. Social Security Offsets – Both the House and Senate versions of the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 82/S. 206), which would fully repeal both the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision, have garnered record numbers of cosponsors. Charlie Rangel, chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, has announced plans to hold a hearing on the bill.

status – The Ways and Means hearing has not been scheduled. NEA continues to push for an immediate hearing followed by movement of the bill through committee as soon as possible.

E. Rural Education – Congress has passed a one-year extension of the expired Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, which ensures a consistent funding stream for rural timber-dependent counties.

status – NEA continues to fight for passage of legislation to reauthorize this important program and ensure its continuation beyond this year. A new bill to do this has been introduced and referred to the appropriate committees.

F. Children's Health Insurance – The House has passed legislation to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides health coverage to uninsured children.

status – SCHIP expires at the end of September. The Senate continues to debate its SCHIP bill, and a vote could occur before Congress adjourns. President Bush has promised to veto any bill that expands the program.

G. Head Start – The House has passed the NEA-supported Improving Head Start Act (H.R. 1429), which provides for increased Head Start funding, focuses on professional development and rejects testing of young children. Also, the Senate education committee has passed a good Head Start bill.

status – The full Senate has not acted on a Head Start reauthorization bill. Timing of any Senate action is unclear.

H. Minimum Wage – Congress passed, and the President signed into law, a three-level increase in the federal minimum wage over two years—from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour.

status – The first step of the three-level wage increase (to \$5.85 per hour) took effect July 24, 2007.

I. School Bus Security – Congress has passed legislation requiring a comprehensive assessment of the threat of a terrorist attack on the nation's school bus transportation system.

status – The larger bill in which these provisions are included is headed to the President who is expected to sign it into law shortly.

Help elect and support Members of Congress who will stand up for students and public education, and, who understand the value of teachers and education support professionals. Raise your voice.

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