

AAG Washington Monitor

No Child Debate Slowed by SCHIP; AAG Urges Walz to Support Geography

Back in July, many Capitol Hill observers felt that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization would make up a key part of the September debate in one or both Houses of Congress. The House and Senate Education Committees had separately indicated a desire to release their draft bills by early August, with the hopes that they could receive feedback during the August recess. This plan, however, never came to pass, and now that September has come and gone, we are still awaiting an announcement as to when the House and Senate leadership teams plan to take up NCLB for floor debate.

The House Education and Labor Committee, led by Rep. George Miller (D-CA), seems to be a bit ahead of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, which is chaired by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA). Miller has released a draft reauthorization bill on his Committee website and asked for public comments. Kennedy's Committee, on the other hand, still has not issued a draft bill for public consumption.

In part, the delay can be tied to an unsettled atmosphere for NCLB in Wash-

ington and beyond: teachers and other key education lobbying groups have been pushing for wholesale changes in the law and the White House and the Congressional leadership still seem uncertain as to what direction they would like to see the reauthorization take. Meanwhile, several presidential candidates in both parties have given speeches criticizing certain aspects of the law and issuing vague calls for reform.

More directly, perhaps, the No Child debate has been forestalled by a major political clash over healthcare funding for children that has dominated Congressional debate and national headlines. The SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) reauthorization has become the lead actor in a Washington drama which includes an oversized proposal by the House, a consensus bill in line with the original Senate legislation, and a veto by President Bush that has been called anything from bold to perplexing.

So where does this leave the NCLB reauthorization? Key players in Washington still assert that it will come up for debate in the next month or two. Chairmen Kennedy and Miller have put countless hours into the topic this year, and the White House would probably like

to complete a reauthorization of the law which President Bush can someday point to as a key part of his legacy.

To this end, the AAG has continued its advocacy on behalf of including funding for geography education in the legislation. On October 5, AAG Executive Director Douglas Richardson sent a letter to Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN), a former geography teacher (see the December 2006 Monitor Column for additional background on Walz), urging him to "play a key role on behalf of (geography) as the NCLB legislation is finalized and comes to the House floor for a vote." Richardson also told Walz that the Congressman is "uniquely positioned" to serve as a leader for geography education and indicated that the AAG would like to work with Walz to "develop and support" a proposal "to include a specific authorization devoted to the teaching of geography" in the NCLB reauthorization.

We will continue to update you on this critical debate as it plays out this fall. For more resources and more information on No Child Left Behind, please visit: <http://aag.org/nclb/index.cfm>. ■

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