

Introduction IRA Legislative Update for July 1, 2007

This report will cover legislative actions that reflect a wide range of issues that are "in play." By this they are in different parts of the legislative process, some at the committee level and others going to the floors of various chambers. Specifically this report will cover: appropriations, NCLB, Head Start, Higher Ed, and Workforce Investment.

Appropriations – FY 08

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have both met and made decisions about education spending. Both have proposed increases for education but differ in their amounts. The House education subcommittee is \$4.2 billion dollars above last year's spending level, while the Senate proposed a \$2 billion dollar increase. Both have recommended cuts to Reading First (House by \$629 million and the Senate by \$229 million) due to their concern with how the US Department of Education managed the program. In contrast both chambers proposed significant increases to Title I, programs for teachers, ELL programs and others. Attached is a chart listing specific programs and their proposed funding.

Of note is that the House full appropriations committee will be meeting the week of July 9 to take up the bill with floor action now expected the following week. Congressman Obey (D-WI) chair of the committee has met with representatives of the education community to ask their support of his bill. He is not planning on accepting any amendments as he hopes to hold a bi-partisan coalition together to support these increases.

Head Start Reauthorization

On Tuesday, June 19, 2007, the Senate passed its version, **S. 556**, of the Head Start Reauthorization Act which would authorize the program for another 5 years. The Senate bill authorizes increased funding of \$7.3 billion in FY 2008 to expand Head Start. This is \$400 million more than FY 2007. The bill calls for funding to grow to \$7.5 billion in FY 2009 and \$7.9 billion in FY 2010. The Senate bill would expand Head Start eligibility for children up to 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL), a 30 percent increase from the current eligibility standard. It would also improve program quality, and give Head Start officials a

larger role. The House version, **HR 1429**, was passed in May. Both bills adds language detailing use of training funds to support enhanced early language and preliteracy development of children in Head Start programs. The bill now goes to a House-Senate Conference who will negotiate the bill's final version before it is sent to the White House for President Bush's signature.

Higher Education Act (HEA) Reauthorization

On June 20, 2007, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions approved the Higher Education Amendments of 2007, **S. 1614**, and the Higher Education Access Act of 2007, **S. 454**. Both bills would combine current grant programs into a single initiative which would enable colleges to partner with high-needs school districts in order to provide extensive field experience for prospective teachers and to establish induction programs to provide extra assistance and training for first- and second-year teachers. The Senate approval came one week after the House education panel approved its version. The Senate bill would cut subsidies to lenders by \$18.3 billion; the House version would cut subsidies by about \$19 billion. Both bills would direct up to \$1 billion to deficit reduction and put the rest of the money into student aid. The proposals would have borrowers pay no more than 15 % of their discretionary income for federally backed student loans which would be forgiven after 25 years. The Senate measure would gradually boost the maximum Pell grant, the nation's main aid program for low-income students, from \$4,300 to \$5,400 a year. The House plan calls for a smaller grant increase but would cut in half the interest rates on federally backed student loans, to 3.4 %.

Workforce Investment Act

*Adult Ed programs
National Institute for Literacy*

NCLB

*Key issues still to be resolved
Movement in July??*

Senior Democrats predict that the bills could come to a vote by the end of July and would be reconciled without significant difficulty.

Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization

The Department of Labor submitted a Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization proposal to Congress on June 7, 2007. The "Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2007" would reauthorize and reform title I of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). The initiative is designed to improve the effectiveness

and competitiveness of American workers by increasing education and training opportunities. The plan would provide greater flexibility to states and local areas, and strengthen the One-Stop Career Center system. Funds appropriated for the WIA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Programs and the Employment Service would be consolidated and allocated to states – and through states to local areas – as a single funding stream for Career Advancement Accounts (CAA) and employment services for job seekers and employers.

No Child Left Behind Reauthorization

The president on June 26th made a statement calling for the rewriting of NCLB this year. Both the House and Senate education committee chairman continue to push for the reauthorization. Several times we have heard that each committee will have a bill drafted in July. What isn't clear is how comprehensive these drafts will be. The House may move a bill that is almost a placeholder. This means that the committee will have a bill but that the decisions will be negotiated between the committee meeting and going to the floor, this type of "managers package" is often done to keep the process moving.

Currently we believe that both the House and Senate are working to change how the accountability system is conducted to allow for use of growth models, but specifics haven't been finalized. Among the questions are how to hold school accountable yet be realistic in Reading First working with ELL and handicapped populations. The question is how to balance the idea of maintaining a high level of attention on specific populations while at the same time not treating every school that has some challenges the same as a school that has many challenges.

Reading and literacy programs are also in the mix of the discussions. Both House and Senate education committees are interested in middle and high school literacy. IRA has been pushing the Striving Readers

legislation but others are suggesting that a more comprehensive program of high school reform would be more productive. In addition, we are also expecting changes in Reading First – with explicit ethics requirements and perhaps a wider scope for the program.

Conclusion

While many observers are saying NCLB will not be reauthorized this year, the process is still moving forward. IRA leaders need to be aware that many political and education leaders want to see changes in NCLB that will reduce the number of schools that are identified as “in need of school improvement.” The problem is achieving a consensus as to what changes are needed – political leaders are hearing a wide range of opinions from educators and civil rights leaders with little convergence.

The appropriations process shouldn’t escape attention, the House overall funding level is most likely the “high-water mark” for money this cycle. IRA members should review the attached chart and decide whether or not they want to send a letter to their house member to ask them to support the spending plan.