

■ State Update

Pennsylvania Election Re-Cap

There will be a number of new legislators representing Pennsylvania when Congress and the Pennsylvania General Assembly convene new legislative sessions in January 2007. The November election brought to a close a very active electoral season in the Commonwealth in which a number of legislators either did not seek reelection or were defeated at the polls.

Democratic challengers defeated five incumbent Republican legislators from Pennsylvania to help give the Democrats control over the U.S. House and Senate. At the top of the ticket, Bob Casey, Jr. defeated incumbent U.S. Senator Rick Santorum. Democratic challengers defeated four incumbent members of Congress to turn the balance of power in Pennsylvania's U.S. House delegation from 12-9 in favor of the Republicans to 11-8 in favor of the Democrats.

Democrats posted a number of victories to gain control of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives by a margin of 102-101. Prior to the election, the GOP controlled the House by a margin of 108-95. It took three weeks to count all of the ballots in a hotly-contested Chester County seat that decided the balance of power in the House. Republicans are calling for a recount in the race (which looked to be in the control of the GOP until just last week). A total of 50 new

members will be seated in the General Assembly when it convenes a new session in January. About one in four members of the chamber will be freshmen.

In the Pennsylvania Senate, Republicans retained control of the chamber by a margin of 29-21 after winning five open contests for seats formerly held by GOP members.

We intend to reach out to all members of the congressional delegation and the General Assembly to share information about PPC and our issues of interest.

House and Senate Leaders Chosen

Prior to adjourning the 2005-2006 legislative session, the Democratic and Republican caucuses of the House and Senate chose their leaders for the upcoming 2007-2008 legislative session.

The following were elected to leadership positions in the Senate Republican Caucus: President Pro Tempore, Joseph Scarnati (R-Jefferson); Majority Leader, Dominic Pileggi, (R-Delaware); Majority Whip, Jane Ori

continued on page two

Inside	
Education Update	3
Federal Update	5

State Update continued from page one

(R-Allegheny); Majority Appropriations Chair, Gib Armstrong (R-Lancaster); Majority Caucus Chair, Mike Waugh (R-York); Majority Caucus Secretary, Robert Robbins (R-Mercer). The positions of Majority Policy Chair and Majority Caucus Administrator are appointed positions and are to be decided.

The Senate Democratic Leadership will be as follows: Democratic Leader, Robert Mellow (D-Lackawanna); Democratic Whip, Michael O’Pake (D-Berks); Democratic Appropriations Chair, Vincent Fumo (D-Philadelphia); Democratic Policy Chair, Richard Kasunic (D-Fayette); Democratic Caucus Chair, Jay Costa (D-Allegheny); Democratic Caucus Secretary, Gerald LaWalle (D-Beaver); Caucus Administrator, Connie Williams (D-Montgomery).

Please note – The House selected its leaders when it appeared that the Republicans would control the chamber. Now, it appears that the Democrats will control the House. Information on the final make-up of House leaders should be available soon.

State Revenue Update

The Department of Revenue reported that the state collected \$1.6 billion in General Fund revenue in November. The November collections are \$56.4 million or 3.6 percent above the official estimate. Fiscal year-to-date collections total \$9.2 billion, which is \$8.7 million or 0.1 percent above the official estimate.

Healthy Farms & Healthy Schools

Governor Rendell signed SB 1209 into law as Act 184 of 2006. The Healthy Farms and Healthy Schools Act will promote the state’s agricultural products and encourage young people to eat a healthier diet by coordinating the delivery of locally-grown farm products to school students.

Youth in Transition Project

The Rendell Administration has created the Pennsylvania Youth in Transition Project (PAYT). The Project is designed to reconnect young people who left high school before graduation or are aging out of foster care, with opportunities to receive career-focused education. Under PAYT, the Commonwealth will award four to six grants of \$150,000 to \$200,000 to state and local partners to find ways to improve educational and employment options for out of school youth and youth aging out of foster care. The funding will help increase community-based strategies that address young people’s needs through counseling and training that focuses on high school completion, postsecondary preparation and career success.

“This new initiative will complement the work PPC is doing through our Ready By 21™ Coalition,” said Joan Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. “Our RB21 agenda focuses on ensuring youth have the skills and supports they need to successfully transition to adulthood. I applaud the Rendell Administration for establishing PAYT and for recognizing the importance of helping our youth succeed.”

More information on the Pennsylvania Youth in Transition Project (PAYT) is available by clicking here:

http://www.paworkforce.state.pa.us/about/lib/about/documents/pa_youth_in_transition_guidelines.pdf

Child Care Regulations Update

In November, the Department of Public Welfare revised and re-submitted its final regulations regarding child care subsidy (#14-505/Chapter 168). As revised, the rulemaking allows the Department of Public Welfare to: unify the subsidized child care system for TANF, Food Stamp, and General Assistance families through the Child Care Information Services (CCIS) agencies; require a vendor pay system which pays providers rather

than parents; and aligns child care policies to be consistent with those CCIS agencies currently follow.

PPC has long advocated for changes in the system that would remove unnecessary administrative barriers in the subsidized child care system. PPC believes that the final rulemaking moves Pennsylvania ahead in creating a seamless system that will ensure the accessibility of accountable and appropriate child care for low-income, working families.

The Pennsylvania Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC) approved the child care regulations at its meeting Nov. 30. The final regulations will take effect upon publication in the Pennsylvania Bulletin.

Pennsylvania Eligible for More Child Protection Resources

The Governor signed House Bill 2670 into law as Act 146 of 2006. The new law brings the Commonwealth into compliance with the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). Compliance with the federal law means that Pennsylvania could potentially receive up to

\$1.7 million in federal funds for child abuse prevention and treatment programs. The state can receive a federal basic state grant of approximately \$1 million, and it will be eligible to apply for a grant of approximately \$700,000 under the federal Children's Justice Act.

Act 146:

- Establishes new conditions for the termination of parental rights;
- Allows confidential child abuse reports to be available to federal agencies in order to protect children from abuse and neglect;
- Requires the Department of Public Welfare to establish citizen review panels to examine policies, procedures and practices related to the protection of children;
- Requires the Department to report more frequently on child abuse cases that result in death or a near fatality; and
- Requires health care providers to immediately report when an infant is identified as being affected by exposure to illegal substances.

Education Update

The State Board of Education proposed a number of important changes in its teacher certification regulations (Chapter 49) at its meeting June 29, and, following initial regulatory review procedures, the proposed revisions were published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin on November 25 (<http://www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol36/36-47/2312.html>). Public comments are invited by the Board and can be sent **up until December 25** to Jim Buckheit, Executive Director, State Board of Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.

The proposed changes are designed to assure future teachers will have preparation in teaching students with disabilities and English language learners and

that certificates will be better aligned with the developmental levels of the children to be taught. Under the proposed changes:

- Beginning in 2012, teachers of preschool through 3rd grade will need an early childhood certificate; teachers of 4th through 8th grades will need an elementary/middle school certificate; and teachers of 9th through 12th grades will need a secondary school certificate. Currently, early childhood teachers can teach pre-K through 3rd grade; elementary teachers can teach K-6th grade; and secondary teachers can teach 7th-12th grades.

- Future teachers will need the equivalent of nine credits (or three courses) in teaching students with disabilities and three credits (or one course) in teaching English language learners.
- The current pre-K-12 special education certificate will be split into two – one for pre-K through 8th grade and the other for 7th through 12th grades. Special education teachers will be required to have dual certification with either early childhood, elementary/middle, or secondary education.
- PDE will be required to develop an accelerated program to allow future early childhood teachers to obtain elementary/middle school certification expeditiously and vice versa.
- The Secretary of Education will be permitted to grant individual exceptions and, in the case of demonstrated personnel shortages, statewide exceptions.
- Teacher education programs will be granted time to plan and, if necessary, cooperate with one another (e.g., in the case of universities that offer elementary education but not special education programs), since the new rules will apply to teachers receiving their certification in 2012 (presumably those entering college in the fall of 2008).
- All teachers certified prior to 2012 will be grandfathered with their broader certificates.

PPC has been advocating these changes for several years, and PPC President and CEO Joan Benso spoke in favor of them at the State Board meeting in June. The Board has been working on these proposed changes for over a year and modified them several times in response to concerns from interested parties. They have been the subject of several public hearings, roundtable discussions, and stakeholder forums (the latter conducted by PDE staff).

There is an organized and vocal opposition to several of these changes, and Benso urged supporters to make their views known in public

comments to Buckheit, “just as we will later this month. We will stress the importance of these changes in assuring future teachers have the knowledge and skills to be as effective as possible in teaching the diversity of children they will face and the developmental knowledge to teach a more appropriate range of grades,” she said.

Benso also urged supporters to contact the Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC) and the chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees, all of which have the opportunity to comment on the proposed regulations.

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Executive Director
IRRC
333 Market Street, 14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Hon. James J. Rhoades
Chair
Senate Education Committee
362 Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Hon. Raphael J. Musto
Democratic Chair
Senate Education Committee
17 East Wing – Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Hon. James R. Roebuck, Jr.
Chair
House Education Committee
208 Irvis Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Hon. Jess M. Stairs
Republican Chair
House Education Committee
43 East Wing – Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Federal Update

Federal Budget to be Delayed

It appears that Congress will not complete the current federal fiscal year 2007 budget during the remaining days of its lame duck session. Congress will most likely pass another continuing resolution this month to keep programs operating for one or more months. Resolution of the budget will fall into the hands of the new 110th Congress.

Federal Medicaid Commission Recommendations

The federal Medicaid Commission appointed last year by Health & Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt met in November and approved a “chairman’s mark” of recommendations for changing the program. A final report is expected in December.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the recommendations are framed so broadly that it is difficult to determine exactly what policy changes they would make. No cost estimates are provided. Nevertheless, a number of the recommendations raise serious concerns, especially for vulnerable groups such as low-income seniors or people with disabilities. The most significant of the recommendations calls for giving states far-reaching and open-ended flexibility to change Medicaid benefits and eligibility.

The recommendation appears to go far beyond what states can do under the Deficit Reduction Act enacted this February, which allows states to provide scaled-back benefits for some children and parents. Under the commission proposal, states could provide scaled-back benefits to certain groups of beneficiaries based on their health condition, their age, or where they live, without any apparent exemption for elderly people or people with disabilities.

The recommendation also appears to go far beyond what states have been allowed to do through waivers

of federal Medicaid law. Through waivers, states have been allowed to provide limited benefit packages (such as packages that do not include hospital care) for groups that are ineligible for Medicaid under usual program rules, such as childless adults. The chairman’s mark apparently would allow a state to provide this same limited benefit to groups that are eligible for full Medicaid coverage, such as parents, children, and the elderly or seriously disabled. States apparently could simply provide beneficiaries with vouchers to purchase coverage on their own in the private market, with no federal standards as to the benefits that the plans would have to cover, no limits on the out-of-pocket costs that poor beneficiaries would have to pay, and no guarantees of access to affordable plans in the generally unregulated private market.

Democratic congressional leaders have indicated that the final Medicaid Commission report will be “dead on arrival” in Congress. Despite this, we believe that since the subject matter is of such great significance, PPC actively will follow the issuance of the final report and advocate against any policy proposals that could impair Medicaid’s position as the backbone of children’s public health care in America.

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
<http://www.cbpp.org>

Support SCHIP Funding Increase

Our allies at Voices for America’s Children sent this to us and we are passing it on to you because it is so important. Please read and take action by urging Congress to support a fiscal year 2008 funding increase for SCHIP, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program. Created in 1997, federal SCHIP funds help states provide health coverage for otherwise uninsured children. In Pennsylvania, approximately 145,788 children are covered through CHIP.

Please take action today! Thank you.

Urge the President to Support a FY 2008 Funding Increase for SCHIP

HOW TO TAKE ACTION:

- 1 – Edit and send this [template congratulatory note](#) (.doc) to any representative or senator who just won an election, to inform them of the importance of supporting the SCHIP program.
- 2 – Encourage governors to send letters (in collaboration with the National Governors Association or other Governors) to the:
 - White House (for ex., this [letter to White House](#) from governors in states facing shortfalls)
 - Congressional Committees (for ex: this [letter to Senate Finance and House Energy & Commerce Committees from the NGA](#))
 - your state’s federal delegation
- 3 – Stress the urgency! OMB is making critical decisions about the President’s next budget plan now through December. (For help convincing governors, representatives and senators of the larger case for increased SCHIP funding, see our [Child Health/SCHIP talking points](#).)

Our Message:

“The President’s FY 2008 budget must include new additional funds for SCHIP above the current level of \$5 billion per year, so that enrolled kids can keep their health insurance and more children can get the health care they need.”

Targets:

Governors, U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives

Why Are We Doing This?

Influencing the president’s budget proposal is complex. Governors, senators and representatives are in the best position to affect these decisions. Child advocates must make the case for increased SCHIP funding with these officials, who can then take action to influence the internal White House budget process.

Since the release of the President’s budget proposal in February is the starting point for Congressional deliberations on prioritizing our nation’s financial resources, securing increased funding for SCHIP in the President’s budget proposal is an important effort.