

NREAC Update

April 15, 2015

Attendees: Jerry White, Jon Habben, Phil Gerik, Don Rodgers, Jules Waber, Dan Rask



ESEA

- **House:** The House ESEA bill (HR 5) was moving along quickly, until it was dropped in February when some far right members got pressure to oppose. Right now, we need members to keep the pressure on the House to bring their bill to vote, especially the far right. The reality is that the House bill will be partisan, and that means we need the Rs to vote for it. The bill is not perfect, something we attested to in our letter of endorsement. I will share this letter as well as some talking points for you to contact your members. PLEASE contact your representatives, especially Republicans.
- **Senate:** The Senate is marking up ESEA in committee this week. The bill is an improvement over both current law and the House version. AASA has endorsed the bill. The biggest take aways are that all the major concerns we had with the House bill are fixed in the Senate bill (keeps MoE, no portability, no funding caps). In terms of rural, REAP is reauthorized as we like. There is an Office of Rural Ed Policy amendment but it has been withdrawn. Bennet has filed a series of rural-related amendments (including allowing rural LEAs to submit consolidated Title I plans through their ESAs, technical assistance to rurals in competitive grants, etc...) Check the amendment summary for details. 87 amendments were filed and not all will be considered. We will report on any that are adopted once the markup process is done.
- We also recently had 49 of our state affiliates sign on to a letter to Congress, urging them to reauthorize ESEA. California was the only state not to sign on (North Carolina has two affiliates and Hawaii doesn't have one). This was the first time AASA has gotten that kind of broad consensus, and has been helpful in messaging the need for action.
- **Secure Rural Schools (Forest Counties):** We secured crucial language to extend the Secure Rural Schools and Communities (Forest Counties) act. The House language provides a two-year extension of the program, a portion of which is retroactive, as funds had expired in September 2014. The program provided \$270 million to 729 counties in the year ending in Sept. 2014. The two-year extension is located in section 524 of [HR 2, Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015](#). The SRS extension was included in a broader health care bill, the so-called 'doc fix'. The Senate adopted the bill yesterday, in a rare moment of bipartisan agreement. It includes two years of SRS at 5% ramp down per year. It includes a provision that payments must be made this year within 45 days of the passage and signing of the bill. I'll also send out a recent report on the history of reauthorizing the Forest Counties program ([posted in this folder](#)).

EBS

- We are reviving an issue that's been quiet since 2008 – the Educational Broadband Service (formerly Instructional Television Fixed Service, or ITFS). Through this program, low level broadband is made available to educational entities. Most schools getting this service don't use it themselves – instead, they lease it out to companies like Sprint or AT&T and put the profit into their schools. We are working with the FCC, which runs the program, to reopen licenses to allow more schools to use it and to broaden the area that is eligible for each. Rural connectivity could be very important under this. While many rural areas won't be able to get companies to lease their bandwidth, they can use the spectrum to increase internet access throughout the community, increasing student access to the internet in some areas where internet connectivity is nearly impossible. We're working with the FCC now, and will pull NREAC as the voice of rural communities.

Appropriations and Funding

- Appropriations bills are starting to trickle out, but no details on the LHHS approps bill.
- The House and Senate have both passed their budget resolutions, to which we are opposed. The budgets will now go to conference. We are hoping the conference falls apart. While the budget details are light on specifics for K12, we have concerns that a final conference bill will include instructions for reconciliation (ie, cuts to only some appropriations bills, and we anticipate LHHS would be one of them.) The House members of the budget conference panel are Budget Chairman Tom Price from Ga., and ranking member Chris Van Hollen of Md., along with Republicans Mario Diaz-Balart of Florida, Diane Black of Tennessee, Todd Rokita of Indiana and John Moolenaar of Michigan. Along with Van Hollen, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi named Democrats John Yarmuth of Kentucky and Gwen Moore of Wisconsin. Senate conferees will be named later this week. The conference might take two weeks to conclude its work.
- The allocation of a specific amount (going from the budget to appropriations) is called the 302(b) allocation. We are currently circulating a letter throughout the health, education, child development, social services, and workforce communities that urges appropriators to restore the Fiscal Year 2016 302(b) allocation for the Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to at least the FY 2010 level of \$163.6 billion. By contrast the final FY 15 302(b) allocation was \$156.8 billion. AASA, NREA and NREAC are signed on, and we strongly urge each rural state affiliate to sign on here:
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1MR3uWeHUryge6fs4jnwsGe6XPdeThsi4zR5IJK2ucxl/viewform>

Other topics

- Jerry reached out recently that the NREAC pages on the AASA website are outdated. Now that AASA has a new website, it's a good time to go through and update that. Please take a few minutes to look through the site and send me your thoughts and suggestions. We can talk about bigger changes in next month's call, and any resources you want to add.

- Another great resource is the Committee on Education Funding's detailed analysis and response to Presidential Budget. This is a super comprehensive look at more than 80 federal programs related to education, with a brief summary and history of funding for each program, as well as opening charts on the broader trends in education investment. <http://cef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015FullBudgetBook-March-31.pdf>