

Status of Labor-HHS Bill, December 21, 2005

Just to clarify, Labor-HHS has not been voted on as yet. Cheyney voted to break the tie on the reconciliation appropriation. Word from the Hill is that they still don't have the votes to pass Labor-HHS. They will force a vote later today.

Also, below is an article published in Congress Daily. NAGE has been working feverishly to leverage press coverage, both locally and nationally, with Andrea Sherman taking the lead. This article could not have been more strategically placed and the timing is great! Thanks and kudos to Andrea, who has been working with the publicist NAGE has hired to support our efforts on behalf of continued funding for geriatrics.

Here is the text of the Congress Daily article. Please circulate to all your Senate contacts. Thanks.
Elyse

APPROPRIATIONS

Votes To Pass Labor-HHS Still Lacking

Senate Republican leaders Tuesday were apparently still short of votes to pass the \$142.5 billion FY06 Labor-HHS appropriations conference report.

The Senate canceled a planned vote last week, after it became clear

Republicans lacked the votes to pass it. At the time, Republican leaders

cited a lack of attendance, but the return of many senators for votes this week has not eased concerns that the bill might fail.

Aides said Majority Leader Frist planned to pass it by unanimous consent late this week after most business had been wrapped and senators have left town.

Minority Leader Reid, though, has served notice he would block such

a strategy, and force a roll call vote to put each senator on record about the austere bill.

"If they are going to say this is the best Congress can do, then they can stand up and vote for it," said a spokeswoman for Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee ranking member Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

The \$142.5 billion bill is smaller than last year's, and cuts to National Institutes of Health research, the No Child Left Behind Act

and other programs are provoking some GOP opposition.

Democrats are expected to unanimously oppose the measure, and several GOP moderates will hold the key to the report's fate.

Indicating the tenuous position the bill is in, Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Arlen Specter, R-Pa., reversed himself Tuesday, declaring he would vote for the bill. He had earlier indicated he would vote no if the bill was not in danger.

"We now face an alternative of a continuing resolution which would reduce funding by \$3 billion," Specter said. "So there's not much choice. I'm going to vote for this bad bill as opposed to accepting a worse alternative."

"I assume that they don't have the votes or they'd have already pulled it up," said Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., who added he would vote against the measure, in part because it does not have earmarks. "The fact that they knocked out any opportunity for some line-items really hurt me," he said.

Other sources, including a lobbyist tracking the bill who spoke on condition of anonymity, were more direct. "It's going down. They don't have the votes," the lobbyist said. "The question is when do[es the House] come back and do a CR?"

Lott said he was impressed appropriators were able to keep the cost of the bill down, but that there was still too much spending in some areas, particularly low-income heating subsidies. "I like the CR better because it level-funds it, and if we're not going to get any specific projects, medical centers and things of that nature, then we at least ought to level-fund it."

Meanwhile, advocates for seniors criticized the measure's elimination of funding for a program that trains caregivers how to deal with elderly patients.

The conference report zeroes out \$31.5 million in funding for geriatric education programs that was in last year's budget, after the Senate proposed funding it at \$29.5 million and the House at zero.

That has angered seniors' advocates, who say congressional Republicans are cutting their programs just as the White House is touting the services as crucial to providing health care to the aging baby boomer generation.

A recent White House conference on aging adopted two resolutions supporting the training of caretakers for the elderly.

Fifty centers across the United States will feel the brunt of the proposed cuts, and some likely will be forced to shut down their

operations if they cannot find alternative funding sources by June 30, when current funding expires, they say.

"The paradox of the White House Conference on Aging and then these

cuts is staggering," said Andrea Sherman, the project director of New York Geriatric Education Centers, one of the centers that will see its funding eliminated. "It means care is going to be mediocre and sends a very clear message that this is not a priority."

Geriatric centers train healthcare providers, social workers and others about the special mental and health needs of seniors. By

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