

No Christmas Miracle for Geriatrics, December 22, 2005

The fight for Labor-HHS (3010) ended late last night, in an unusual and quick turn of events. Amidst discussions on the Defense Appropriation bill, and with trade-offs and deals being made, Frist ushered in the Labor-HHS bill and called for a voice vote. This move allowed the bill to pass. Despite all of our best efforts, the outcome is not what we or many others wanted. Both Senators Harkin and Specter had acknowledged that Labor-H was a bad bill. We did a fine job rallying support. Unfortunately, time was not on our side. The Senate was anxious to finish debate and get out of town for the holiday. (Below is an article by Emily Heil which provides details of the vote).

What are our next steps? We will wait for the new year and begin to talk to staffers and explore the possibility (albeit slim) of a supplemental appropriation at some level that may keep geriatrics alive in 2006. We will also begin to strategize for getting geriatrics back in the budget for FY 2007. I have spoken with Joan Weiss and now that we know the outcome of geriatric funding for the coming year, she will be speaking with the Bureau leadership. We will be provided with direction as to how to proceed in the next few weeks, but it is still too soon to expect immediate answers.

I want to thank all of you for your stellar efforts on behalf of geriatric education. The leadership and provided by Andrea Sherman and Bob Roush throughout many agonizing hours of this roller-coaster ride have been remarkable. Although we did not win this battle, we could not have come this far without all of us pulling together as a network. We will survive this cut and return stronger and better for it. We have gotten on the radar screens of our legislators with press coverage and our advocacy efforts. Next year, we will begin talking to staffers in January and work feverishly to reinstate our much-needed geriatrics education and training programs. We will find a champion for our cause!

Again, my thanks to our dedicated and thoroughly committed network of GECs and the geriatric leadership. I wish you all a happy holiday season and some much-needed relaxation! I know that geriatrics will reemerge stronger than ever in the new year.

Regards to all,
Elyse

APPROPRIATIONS

Labor-HHS Spending Plan Rides Defense Bill To Passage

The \$142.5 billion FY06 Labor-HHS appropriations conference report hitched a ride with the FY06 Defense appropriations bill late Wednesday night under an agreement hammered out by leaders of both parties. Under the resolution enacted by voice vote, once the House approves a modified version of the FY06 Defense appropriations bill, the Labor-HHS conference report would be deemed passed in the Senate, and it would be sent to the president's desk. The Labor-HHS package is \$1.5 billion smaller than last year's bill -- even before across-the-board spending cuts this year.

Cuts to National Institutes of Health research, the No Child Left Behind Act and other programs had provoked opposition from GOP moderates and raised the prospect that they would join Democrats to defeat the bill. But opponents ultimately were swayed to allow the bill to pass because the alternative -- a continuing resolution that would fund programs at the lower of the House bill, the Senate bill, or last year's bill -- would result in even steeper funding cuts. Senate Minority Whip Durbin said Democrats were confident they had the 51 votes needed to defeat the bill but lacked the 60 votes needed to overcome a potential budget point of order they would encounter if they tried to add money to it.

Ultimately, the bill became part of a deal with Republicans to clear most of the legislative issues pending before the Senate. "Republicans were anxious to pass the bill," Durbin said. "We were anxious to have the Patriot Act issues resolved; those issues came together at the end." Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee ranking member Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, was visibly angry during an exchange on the Senate floor with Minority Leader Reid and other Democrats as senators mingled during the lead-up to the vote. Harkin had wanted a roll call vote on the bill. Durbin said he understood Harkin's anger. "I've never seen him so disappointed," he said. "We reached a point where there was no way ... to put more money in." -- by Emily Heil

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