

# **Society for Nutrition Education Public Policy Legislative & Regulatory Bulletin November 2002**

This newsletter highlights key legislative and regulatory news about nutrition education issues in Washington, D.C. This report is prepared by SNE's Public Policy Consultant, Waterman & Associates.

## **November Elections Change the Political Dynamics for the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress**

The 2002 election resulted in an unprecedented victory for Republicans: for the first time since at least 1902, a Republican President's party has gained seats in both houses of Congress in his first mid-term election. Not only did the Republicans expand its margin in the House of Representatives, they also recaptured the Senate.

When the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress is sworn in on January 7, 2003, Republicans will hold 51 seats, Democrats will have 47 respectively and Jim Jeffords (VT) will be the sole Independent (one seat is pending since Louisiana has a run-off election on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>). The House make-up will be 227 Republicans, 206 Democrats and one Independent (one seat is undecided in Louisiana as we went to print). As you can see from the numbers, despite the GOP sweep of Congress in the mid-term election, the two parties remain virtually evenly divided.

### **The 108<sup>th</sup> Freshman Class**

The Senate's freshman class will have two new Democrats – Mark Pryor (AR) and Frank Lautenberg (NJ). The nine new Republican Senators include: Lamar Alexander (TX); Saxby Chambliss (GA); Norm Coleman (MN); John Cornyn (TX); Elizabeth Dole (NC); Lindsey Graham (SC); John Sununu (R-NH); Jim Talent (MO), as well as an appointee from Alaska. Eight of the 12 new Senators are lawyers. This 12-member class may soon become 13 if incumbent Sen. Mary Landrieu (R-LA) loses to challenger Suzanne Terrell in the Louisiana run-off race in December.

The freshman class in the House will consist of 54 new members. Forty-one of these new lawmakers held previous elective office and 22 are lawyers. In terms of new lawmakers who will likely be sensitive to nutrition education issues, as well as women's and children's issues, Congress gained two new obstetrician-gynecologists, Michael Burgess, MD, (R-TX) and Phil Gingrey, MD (R-GA). They join six other doctors in the House of Representatives, which include Donna Christian-Christensen, MD (D-Virgin Islands), family practice; Ernie Fletcher, MD (R-KY), family practice; Jim McDermott, MD (D-WA), psychiatrist; Ron Paul, MD (R-TX), ob-gyn; Vic Snyder, MD (D-AR), family practice; and Dave Weldon, MD (R-FL), internal medicine. Returning Senator Bill Frist, MD (R-TN) remains the Senate's only physician.

Other key lawmakers with a keen interest in nutrition education issues include the eight new women lawmakers elected to Congress, many with prior government experience. They include the following seven House members: Marsha Blackburn (R-TN); Katherine Harris (R-FL); Denise Majette (D-GA); Candice Miller (R-MI); Marilyn Musgrave (R-CO); Linda Sanchez (D-CA); and Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL). And the Senate will have one new woman Senator, Elizabeth Dole (R-NC), former Red Cross president and Secretary of Labor.

In addition, two new lawmakers with county government and social services experience, Supervisor Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) of Pima County and Baltimore County Executive Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD) will be heading for Washington, D.C. in January as members of the House freshman class.

### **What do the election returns mean for nutrition education issues? What should we expect from the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress?**

Republicans will face heightened expectations for governing over the next two years. Their control of both chambers will allow them to set the agenda and wield the committee gavels in a way they haven't been able to do since the

first few months of the Bush administration. The White House will be working closely with each congressional committee and its staff.

The incoming Republican 108th Congress faces a long list of unfinished business when it convenes in January -- starting with the still-incomplete spending bills for the fiscal year that began nearly two months ago. Given the widening budget deficit, uncertain economy and the unknown but likely high cost of a possible war on Iraq, Congress will find it extremely difficult to come up with the money for existing government priorities, let alone financing new initiatives -- such as additional funds for nutrition education programs contained in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

The new Congress will also have to deal with unresolved and highly controversial welfare reform and a Medicare prescription drug benefit, all of which ended up on the cutting room floor of the outgoing Congress.

Among the key issues that White House officials and GOP lawmakers say they plan to tackle in the next Congress: health care, tax cuts, economic stimulus package, judgeships and funding for the war on terrorism. President Bush will need to remain flexible on appropriations' levels to avoid getting bogged down in opposition as congressional Democrats try to increase funding levels.

In the Senate, the Republicans will need at least some Democratic support to get the 60 votes (the threshold for the passage or even consideration of legislation) required under Senate rules to overcome a filibuster.

### **Election Impact on the Senate**

Now that Republicans have regained the majority in the Senate, Trent Lott (R-MS) will reclaim the post of Senate majority leader from Tom Daschle (D-SD). Sen. Daschle will resume the post of minority leader. The GOP Senate takeover will hand committee chairmanships back to Republicans. Among the major changes:

The Appropriations Committee will be led by Ted Stevens (R-AK). Sen. Stevens will be responsible for handling the 13 appropriations bills that fund the federal agencies and their programs. The new chairman steps into a huge job, as he will be faced with not only working on Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 funding but completing much of the work on the FY 2003 bills carried over into the new Congress.

This committee is important to nutrition education because it appropriates funding to federal agencies and their relevant programs that address nutrition education issues, such as the Department of Agriculture's Food Stamp Program and the National School Lunch Program. Also receiving appropriations through this committee is the Department of Health and Human Services and its programs, like Head Start. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration and National Institutes of Health are awarded appropriated funds as well.

Also dealing with nutrition education issues is the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, which primarily handles the issue side of the programs. Heading up this committee come January is Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS). Sen. Cochran has a long history with the agriculture committee contributing key provisions in the farm bills of 1985, 1990 and 1996. Senator Cochran has also written legislation that provides federal funding for education programs such as teacher training and educational television.

Judd Gregg (R-NH) will replace Ted Kennedy (D-MA) as chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Although he is more conservative than most New England senators, Gregg, 55, has more of a pragmatic bent than some of his more ideological GOP colleagues. He works with Democrats, including Kennedy, on key issues such as education, pensions and health care. This committee oversees many of the largest domestic programs and works on important nutrition education legislation, such as the Improved Nutrition and Physical Activity Act (IMPACT), Federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization and will review programs like the Coordinated School Health Program and Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant.

### **Election Impact on the House**

There will be fewer leadership changes in the House, where Republicans were in charge before the November elections. The two main leadership changes will be for the posts of majority and minority leaders. Rep. Tom DeLay (R-TX) has been elected to serve as majority leader, succeeding Dick Armey (R-TX), who is retiring. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) will be the first woman to head the Democrats' political caucus when she assumes the role of minority leader in January. Pelosi replaces Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-MO), who stepped down from the post following the election.

As well, there will be little change in the leadership of House committees. Only three committees—Armed Services, Government Reform and Resources—will have new chairmen in the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress. Relevant committees to nutrition education issues are Appropriations, Education and Workforce, and Ways and Means. The House Appropriations Committee will continue to be chaired by Rep. Bill Young (R-FL).

Rep. John Boehner (R-OH) will remain as the House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman. Nutrition education issues are on this committee's radar screen as it works on legislation, such as the Better Nutrition for School Children and Federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization, as well as Department of Health and Human Services Programs like Coordinated School Health and Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant.

The House Ways and Means Committee will remain in the hands of Chairman Bill Thomas (R-CA). This powerful panel works on health care issues, including Medicare. IMPACT, the legislation aimed at reducing obesity and encouraging better nutrition and physical activity, will be addressed in the new Congress through this committee.

The House Agriculture Committee will have a new chairman soon. The current chairman, Rep. Larry Combest (R-TX), won reelection in November, but he recently announced his resignation from Congress effective May 31, 2002 thereby causing fellow House Republicans to line up in hopes of gaining his chairman post. The likely successor for the chairmanship is Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), who currently chairs the agricultural subcommittee that deals with nutrition programs. However, another contender running for the position is Rep. Nick Smith (R-MI). The official decision on this chairmanship will not occur until the GOP Steering Committee meets in January.

The House Agriculture Committee is important to SNE for its role with key legislation, such as IMPACT, Federal Child Nutrition Reauthorization, and various Department of Agriculture programs like Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) and National Research Initiative (NRI).

## **Outlook**

Looking forward to the 2004 election, 34 Senate seats and all 435 House seats will be at stake. The Democrats will defend 19 Senate seats, with Republicans defending 15 Senate seats. In a country in which voters appear to be split evenly between the parties, there remains perilously little room for error in the battle for control of the legislative branch.

## **SNE Members Participate in Healthy Schools Summit**

Written By Tracy Fox

The Healthy Schools Summit, which took place in October in Washington, D.C., brought together more than 500 of the nation's leading education, children's health and nutrition organizations in a groundbreaking effort to help improve kids' health and educational performance through better nutrition and physical activity in schools. The summit was planned by more than 30 national organizations, including the Society for Nutrition Education (SNE), to improve children's nutrition and physical activity through creation of healthier school environments.

Developed in response to recent reports linking student health to student achievement, as well as to the Surgeon General's report, *The Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, the summit served as a spring board to help launch and invigorate local efforts long after the summit. Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher was Chair of the summit and Mrs. Laura Bush served as Honorary Chair.

Many SNE members attended the summit with some attending on behalf of SNE. SNE members Tracy Fox (also SNE's representative to the summit) and Marilyn Briggs spoke at the summit. A special congratulations goes to Marilyn Briggs, SNE's immediate past president, who was named one of 27 national 'Healthy School Heroes' in recognition of the exemplary action she has taken to improve children's health. Marilyn was nominated by SNE for developing the California-wide "Choose Well, Be Well" curriculum and for leading the development of a statewide nutrition policy as president of the California Nutrition Council and numerous other initiatives. In addition to a plaque, a \$1,000 grant will be presented to an organization Marilyn names to further her work and the goals of the summit.

SNE President Kathy McMahon organized an impromptu dinner with 10 SNE members to brainstorm where SNE can take a leadership role in this arena and what SNE members can contribute. SNE was well represented by academics, extension, industry, agencies USDA and CDC. Members agreed on a direction to meet the need to set national nutrition education standards including methodology and evaluation for schools. To learn more about the summit, view presentations, and find out how to become active in your state, visit the Healthy School Summit Web site at [www.actionforhealthykids.com](http://www.actionforhealthykids.com).

## **USDA Awards \$2.5 Million to Study Nutrition, Obesity and Food Assistance**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded \$2.5 million for nutrition, obesity and food assistance program grants and cooperative agreements to organizations in six states – California, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Texas and Wisconsin – and the District of Columbia. These grants will focus on the agency’s continued effort to combat the growing obesity problem and to encourage more physical activity. The research projects are competitively awarded by USDA’s Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP), which oversees the Food Stamp Program, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Child Nutrition Programs.

Specifically, the research projects will focus efforts on diet quality in young adults and its relationship to eating patterns; lunch consumption by middle school students; innovative practices within the WIC program; children’s food insecurity and its relationship to social behavioral problems and poor academic achievement; coordination between WIC and Medicaid programs; Food Stamp Program administrative costs; and food assistance as a social safety net. For more information on these grants as well as the names of the organizations who were awarded funding, visit USDA’s Web site at <http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/2002/10/0463.doc>.

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