

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

HEAR YE! HERA!

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Dateline Washington – July 5, 2006

With summer now upon us, and with the deluge of rain flooding the streets of Washington, there is time to do a brief update on where we are regarding matters critical to NASSGAP.

First we start with **HERA**. Most of the provisions go into effect this week so FSA, guaranty agencies, lenders, institutions, and everyone else involved in financial aid administration are busily testing systems. Dear Colleague letters have come out frequently (be sure to check IFAP) and the Department has been having weekly “webinars” to clarify the rules. Among the concerns for NASSGAP are the Academic Competitiveness Grants and the definition of rigorous program. 39 of the states submitted curricula that would qualify as rigorous programs for the AC Grants and by July 1st the Secretary will issue its list of approved programs. It remains to be seen what happens if a state’s request is denied. But if nothing else, the five already-approved criteria can be used by students to qualify.

Next, briefly, we deal with **APPROPRIATIONS**. As of this writing, it appears the very last appropriations bill to be dealt with will be the one we care most about. And it doesn’t look likely that the bill will be dealt with in the near future. It’s possible even that it will not get approved until after the election, which of course is after the fiscal year ends on October 1. What does that mean? Good question. Appropriations is one of the most hotly debated issues facing an already bitterly divided Congress. After all, money is what gets voters to choose their representatives. For right now I personally think the main programs affecting NASSGAP members the most – LEAP, GEAR UP, and TRIO – are safe. The House included funding in its appropriations bill and the Senate is likely to do the same (if it ever gets passed). That’s no guaranty, but typically there’s been good support from the Senate. In the House we have a champion in

Ralph Regula from Ohio who is the chair of the education appropriations subcommittee and who thinks LEAP is terrific. So I’m optimistic that the programs will all get money. There’s the possibility of reductions, though at the level LEAP is now, probably not. Unless there’s another across-the-board cut. The Pell Grant maximum will likely rise, perhaps to \$4150. It’s possible that could be higher, but in this austere climate, I wouldn’t bet the ranch on it

As for **REAUTHORIZATION**, this is another one of those “who knows?” questions. Senator Frist reserved the second week in September for “education.” But he had already reserved a week in June and a week in July, both of which got postponed. Education week would include getting a reauthorization bill passed by the Senate and conferencing with the House. The House already passed its version. The Senate bill has to come back up for a vote because the bill that passed was in last year’s session. If education week in September doesn’t happen, then it’s anyone’s guess as to when. The Senate is targeting October 6th for its adjournment. And as we all know, a month later there could be a very different Senate and House. If it goes past the election, the Congress will very likely extend the current HEA for a year, allowing the new Congress to reauthorize. Frankly, with the poll numbers looking the way they are, Democrats are not in a hurry to work out a bill. Republicans, hoping to reverse the poll numbers, don’t want to do anything that would jeopardize middle-class voters. Education is one of those personal topics that influences how a person votes. And as we all know, “all politics is local.”

Throughout the summer we will provide sporadic updates. As always, they will be posted to the website. In addition, we will send out an email alert to the listserve so you know to check the web.

As always, I welcome comments and questions. You can call me at (571) 239-0511 or write to bartastor@cox.net.

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