

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

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First Issue !

Welcome to the "Dateline: Washington" Column. This is the first of what will be a regular series. We will bring you the latest information about what's going on at the federal level that affects NASSGAP members. It will be brief but we hope have enough substance that you'll come back often for your "fix." When appropriate we'll provide links to other sites that can give you more information about specific topics. If you have any ideas or suggestions or if there's something you think we should include, please email me directly so I can include it in the next column (there's a link to my email at the bottom of this column).

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To start off, we should all acknowledge today (11/8/05) as a special day in our history. It is the **40th anniversary of the signing of the Higher Education Act.** In helping to provide opportunity and access to higher education, this legislation is as important as the GI Bill and the Morrill Act of 1862 that helped establish state supported colleges. So it's fitting that in this first column we discuss reauthorization. Essentially, it's proceeding. But before it can go anywhere, there has to be budget reconciliation in each house and then a joint reconciliation. The **Senate** passed its reconciliation last week, having cut \$39 billion from the budget over five years (mostly from mandatory programs such as Medicaid but also including \$9 billion from student loans). The **House** is expected to deal with it on Thursday and there's great concern they'll cut even more – over \$50 billion, \$14 billion in student loans. Check back later in the week for the latest.

Once the **Reauthorization** bills go through budget reconciliation, they have to be passed in each house. Then there has to be a conference to reconcile the differences between the two

bills. Some are saying it can be done by the end of this year (the HEA was extended until 12/31/05); some say no way. Not only are there budget implications, there are also 11 more appropriations bills to be passed, Supreme Court hearings for Sam Alito (although pushed to January now), Thanksgiving recess, and other activities involving White House staff. So if I had to guess, I'd say it will not be done by January and they'll pass another extension until March 31, 2006.

As far as **LEAP, GEAR UP**, Pell, most campus-based programs, and TRIO are concerned, so far, we're in decent shape. Funding for most of these programs is in both houses' appropriations bills and continuation of the programs is in both reauthorization bills. There might be some program cuts (e.g., Perkins Federal contribution) but most programs are faring as well as can be expected. That could change, of course, but I would doubt it. Fact is, there's some pretty good support for student aid in the Congress. Pell, GEAR UP and TRIO are Congressional favorites. And LEAP has important "champions," on both the Republican and Democrat sides. The fact that Federal dollars are leveraged by the states makes it particularly attractive.

In the next update, hopefully at the end of this week, we'll know more about the budget and, possibly the timetable for reauthorization.

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