

## CAN Report

# Politics Slows Down Congressional Activity in Washington

Joel Mittler, Ed. D., CAN Coordinator

While most of us are toiling away in schools, universities, agencies, or elsewhere, Washington continues to get bogged down in politics. So it is with the appropriations process and with reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). While appropriations may be settled by the time that you read this, action on NCLB appears to be stalled, at least for now.

NCLB legislation has been under consideration for many months. It appears, however, that both the House and the Senate, despite promises to bring bills to the floor during the fall, have been unable to do so. NCLB has had many concerned parties, including CEC, voice their opinions about reauthorization over the past year. While it may seem that Democratically controlled committees in both houses should be able to agree on a reauthorization, such an agreement is not that simple to obtain. After all, there are strong differences even among the major advocacy groups as to the necessary changes. In addition, any changes need to be negotiated with both the President and the Republican minority, especially in the Senate where legislative rules give the minority party powers to slow down or stop legislation they do not support. You may recall the reauthorization of IDEA that led to the 1997 version. It was held up for over three years while all the parties worked out their differences. In any event, while both the House and Senate leaders have pushed off NCLB reauthorization until next year, the Congressional elections of 2008 and the Presidential election may make any Congressional action impossible to achieve until a new President is elected. After all, the candidates will likely take differing positions about

NCLB, making agreement in the Congress difficult to achieve. Stay tuned!

The annual appropriations process also got stymied by politics. The process starts in February when the President issues his budget request for the next fiscal year (FY), beginning the following October 1. The Senate and the House each assign subcommittees to evaluate the request and make their own recommendations. Ultimately, the Senate and the House each pass appropriation bills. When there are differences between the two bills of each body, a Conference Committee is needed to work out the differences. The final agreed upon bill is sent to the President for his signature. All of this needs to be accomplished by October 1, when the new fiscal year is scheduled to begin. So it was this year when the conference for the bill containing education funding for fiscal year 2008 was finalized and sent to the President in late October. Unfortunately, a few days later, the President vetoed that bill.

As we go to press, we are awaiting for either a Congressional override of the veto (unlikely) or a negotiated settlement with the President. While the President's initial budget request called for a very small increase in IDEA school aged funding, actually lowering the federal share below 17%, the bill that was sent to him includes a modest increase, raising that share to 17.7%, still far from the promised 40%. Other IDEA funding, Javits funding for the gifted, and special education research funding were either set at the same levels as last year or received slight increases. Technology and Media Services received a very small \$1.6 million increase. While the gov-

ernment keeps on running at last year's levels through passage of a "Continuing Resolution", it is hard to know how or when the actual appropriations for FY 2008 will actually be completed or at what levels.

In both these areas, CEC remains actively involved, often with other advocacy groups as allies. They issue weekly updates, occasionally ask for letters to be sent to members of Congress, and respond to requests from The Department of Education when needed. If you wish to receive weekly updates from CEC or have any other questions, feel free to contact me at [jmittler@liu.edu](mailto:jmittler@liu.edu).

## TAM Hosts Poster Sessions at ATIA 2008

For the past several years, TAM has been an active partner in the educational program at the annual conference of the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA). At this year's conference—which will be held in Orlando, Florida, from January 31 through February 2, 2008—TAM will play an enhanced role. In addition to chairing the Research and Professional Development strand of the conference, this year TAM will host the first-ever display of poster sessions. Be sure to visit the poster session area to visit with fellow TAM members, see what's new, and take advantage of the opportunity to spend time sharing ideas with the presenters. We are looking forward to seeing you there!