



★ WASHINGTON WATCH ★

An update on federal action from

The Center for Public Policy Priorities

900 Lydia Street • Austin, Texas 78702-2625 • 512-320-0222 voice • 512-320-0227 fax

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Critical Period of Congressional Action Approaches

The next few months will bring to a head all the promises and threats raised by the Republican victories in last year's election. The future size and shape of American government may be determined by critical choices being made now.

The Congress must pass 13 appropriations bills before October 1, the start of the federal fiscal year, to keep the government's agencies running. These bills traditionally must fit within the limits of the Congressional budget resolution — which was passed in June — and must be signed by the President. If the House and Senate are unable to agree on a budget bill by the deadline, or if the President vetoes a bill, the Congress would have to pass a continuing resolution to keep the affected agencies functioning. Although some agencies may be temporarily shut down before an agreement is reached — a scenario

referred to in Washington as "The Train Wreck" — eventually all the appropriations bills will become law.

The Congress will also consider an Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA), which would cut entitlement programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps and AFDC, while granting certain tax breaks. The reconciliation bill is the main vehicle for balancing the budget, but it does not have to pass to allow government agencies to continue to operate. The odds of passing an OBRA that cuts entitlements may be increased by linking the bill to an amendment that would renew the government's borrowing ability, which expires in November. A veto of a reconciliation bill that contained borrowing authority could threaten default on U.S. Treasury bonds, and is almost inconceivable. Therefore, some compromise between President Clinton and the Congress would have to be negotiated.

Senate Likely to Vote This Week on Republican Welfare Reform Bill (S.1120)

When the Senate resumed work last week, welfare reform was at the top of the agenda. On Thursday, Sept. 7th, the Senate voted down the Daschle Democratic welfare reform alternative. On Friday the 8th, under a compromise with conservative Republicans, Sen. Dole accepted an amendment to his bill (S.1120) which would prohibit states from providing additional benefits for children born to families already on welfare (the "family cap") and would give states the option to provide the families with vouchers, equal to the amount of funds they would have received without the cap, for such items as diapers and formula. Another amendment would provide bonuses to states which lower their rates of out-of-wedlock births without increasing the number of abortions. Conflict among Senators still remains concerning maintenance-of-effort and child care

provisions in the bill. Also on Friday, the Senate rejected a substitute bill by Sen. Moynihan which would have expanded and enhanced the JOBS program and made changes to the child support enforcement system. Friday was also the deadline for submittal of any additional amendments to the bill. Monday has been set aside for addressing child care and maintenance of effort provisions. At the time of this alert votes may be taking place on these two issues. Senator Dole has said he wants the Senate to finish work on the bill by Wednesday or Thursday. If he cannot get a final agreement by then he will likely roll the welfare bill into the Budget Reconciliation Act. Though Texas' Senators are likely to closely support the leadership proposal, it is important that they hear from as many people as possible about several key amendments (below).

Call Your Senators Now and Urge Them To:

- ★ Vote YES on the Kennedy/Dodd child care amendments, providing additional funds.
- ★ Vote YES on the Hatch child care amendment, providing a separate pool of funds for child care.
- ★ Vote YES on the Breaux Maintenance-of-Effort amendment.

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