

CAN news

Children and Youth Action Network

New Congress States Goal of Bipartisanship

On January 4th, 63 new members of Congress joined their experienced colleagues to participate in a swearing-in ceremony, marking the beginning of the 110th Congress. The new Democratic- controlled Congress marks the end of Republican control for both the House and the Senate for 12 – near consecutive – years. It also marks the first time in American history a woman – Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) – has become Speaker of the House, making her the second in line for the presidency. Leaders from both parties – Republicans and Democrats – have vowed to work in a bipartisan fashion, ending what many political pundits have called one of the most divisive times in American politics.

A shift in power in the House and Senate marks new leadership, a new legislative agenda, new committees and new committee membership. The House – led by Speaker Pelosi – has developed an agenda for the first 100 hours of power, including measures relating to student loans, raising the minimum wage, implementation of the 9/11 Commission's report, adjusting negotiating power for the Medicare prescription drug benefit, ethics reform and stem cell research. On January 5th, the House voted 280-152 on an ethics reform package to enforce "pay as you go" budget rules and a process for making earmarks – funding that goes to support specific projects – more transparent. Over the next few weeks, the House is expected to act on student loan legislation that would cut interest rates over a period of time.

Though it has not been officially announced, Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI) is expected to become the chairman of the subcommittee on Education Reform with jurisdiction over the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), now known as No Child Left Behind. ESEA is due to be reauthorized – rewritten – in 2007. This process will allow Congress to make changes to the law and gain input from the public on issues of concern. You can share with CEC your thoughts on highly qualified teacher provisions, assessments (all, modified, alternate), sanctions, funding and more by going to the CEC website at www.cec.sped.org.

Democrats have renamed the Education and the Workforce Committee, reverting back to the Education and Labor Committee title that was used prior to 1997. In addition to addressing ESEA, the Education and Labor Committee will address the reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act and Head Start. All three reauthorizations were left unfinished by the previous Congress – some due to controversial disputes – which the new Congress will address in some fashion.

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