

Limited Increases Expected in Fiscal Year 2003 Education Funding



With Washington confronting an array of thorny issues—from homeland security to a faltering economy—spending increases for education are expected to be minimal this year. In July, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a \$136.6 billion fiscal year 2003 spending bill for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. Though the bill provides a much larger increase than what President Bush had requested (8.6 percent as opposed to 2.4 percent), it fell short of what many education advocates had hoped for. The federal government has more than doubled spending on education since 1996, with last year's increase standing at 18 percent.

The Senate bill restores funding for a number of programs cut under the Bush proposal—including the National Writing Project—providing an overall funding increase of \$4.2 billion to the Department of Education. NWP would receive an \$18 million appropriation under the current Senate bill, thanks in large part to the efforts of Senator Thad Cochran (R-

MS). Senator Cochran has been NWP's champion in the Senate since 1991, the first year the writing project received federal funding.

The bill will go to the Senate floor for a vote in September, at which point Democrats may push for an amendment to make further increases in education spending. The current Senate bill provides a \$1.5 billion

increase for Title I programs, an additional \$850 million for Pell Grants, and an additional \$2 billion for Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants.

As of press time, the House Appropriations Committee had yet to make its fiscal year 2003 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending recommendations. The House is expected to spend just \$131 billion for these programs, matching the level of funding President Bush recommended earlier this year. While the president has been criticized for offering limited resources to implement education reforms, leaders in the House appear intent on honoring his request. And because the administration has recommended eliminating funding for NWP, insiders worry the House of Representatives may well do the same.

If the House and Senate ultimately pass bills that differ on spending for NWP, a House-Senate conference committee will be called upon to rectify the situation. Writing project proponents have long argued that a minimal federal investment in a program that improves student writing and provides much-needed services to teachers is one that is well worth making. Opponents argue that dollars earmarked for small education programs would be better spent elsewhere. While most insiders believe that, in the end, NWP will maintain its federal funding, the situation is far from resolved and could take time to sort out.

If you have questions regarding the federal funding of NWP, please contact Andy Bradshaw at abradshaw@writingproject.org.