

NWP Supporters Converge on Capitol Hill



Having traveled from more than 35 states around the country to Washington, D.C., writing project teacher-leaders packed the Senate Mansfield Room on April 11, for the opening session of this year's National Writing Project Spring Meeting. Participants heard from a number of NWP supporters on Capitol Hill, including Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS), Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Rep. James Leach (R-IA), before visiting the offices of their elected officials.

"It's been easy to get support for NWP because of the testimonials you all give," Cochran told the gathering, reiterating his staunch support of the project.

Specter spoke of the important role education has played in his own life. As ranking minority member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and

Human Services, and Education, Specter, like Cochran, will play an important role in determining whether NWP will continue to receive federal dollars in fiscal year 2003. The fourth-term senator said in closing, "The National Writing Project has a lot of support [on Capitol Hill]."

Others also made strong statements in support of NWP. "The great thing about writing is that . . . it causes one to increase one's capacity in other forms of communication," said Rep. James Leach, a longtime cosponsor of the program. Joan Huffer, education aide for Sen. Tom Daschle (D-SD) brought word that the senate majority leader is committed to ensuring the project receives continued federal funding.

Statements like these, combined with the legislative success enjoyed by NWP earlier this year, set a fairly upbeat tone for the writing project's day

on Capitol Hill. President Bush signed "No Child Left Behind," the long-awaited reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), into law in January. The new law reauthorizes NWP for the next six years, meaning the project should remain eligible to receive federal funding through fiscal year 2007. Further, NWP received a \$14 million appropriation under Washington's fiscal year 2002 spending package, marking the sixth straight year the organization has received an increase in federal funding.



Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS)

But as spring meeting participants prepared to make their rounds on Capitol Hill, they were reminded of the need to continue to get the word out in Washington about the writing project. Despite signing ESEA into law, President Bush has recommend eliminating funding for NWP and a number of other small education programs in his fiscal year 2003 budget. While this does not mean the project will lose its funding next fiscal year—NWP has been left out of the White House budget in previous years and still managed to maintain federal funding—the president's actions did add a sense of urgency to the day's visits.

Appropriations subcommittees in both the House and Senate will meet in late May to make their fiscal year 2003 education funding recommendations. A number of writing project supporters sit on those subcommittees, including Cochran and Specter in the Senate and Roger Wicker (R-MS) in the House. If both subcommittees approve a fiscal year 2003 appropriation for NWP, the likelihood that the writing project will be federally funded next fiscal year will increase greatly. The project is asking for an \$18 million appropriation in fiscal year 2003, a \$4 million increase over the previous year's level of federal funding.

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