



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The Senate and Assembly returned to Albany this week in a two-day session to address a number of issues including budget reform. Although there were apparently “productive” talks around budget reform, no agreement was reached.

However, all three leaders did forge compromises on the following issues:

Javits Center legislation (S.7803/A.11896) would clear the way for the much needed expansion of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center in New York City with a price tag of roughly \$500 million. The legislation also calls for an investment of \$350 million towards economic development and capital projects throughout upstate New York and Long Island. The expansion of the Javits Center is expected to bring 10,000 permanent and 10,000 temporary jobs to the West Side of NYC.

Rockefeller Drug Law legislation (S.7802/A.11895) – the current indeterminate sentencing system would be changed to a determinate sentencing system, which would provide lower sentences for non-violent drug offenders. Changes include: reduction in sentences for certain non-violent class

A-1 felony offenders; sentences for most non-violent first offenders and offenders with prior non-violent felony convictions would decline moderately; and sentences for some classes of drug offenders with prior violent felony convictions would increase.

Minimum Wage – the Senate voted to override the Governor’s veto of the minimum wage bill passed by both houses prior to the election earlier this year raising the wage to \$7.15 by 2007.

However, neither the Senate nor the Assembly voted to override the Governor’s veto of legislation mandating the collection of sales and other taxes on goods sold on Indian Reservations. Left on hold for now was a \$250 million appropriation to fund the Health Care System Improvement Capital Grant program which was created but not funded in this year’s budget (2004-2005).

The Senate is apparently planning to return to Albany on December 20, 2004.

CONGRESS PASSES INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT (IDEA RE-AUTHORIZATION)

On November 19th, 2004, Congress reached agreement on a final special education reform bill that re-authorizes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 is now awaiting signature by President Bush.

Overall, the bill is very similar to the Senate version passed in May, 2004, although there are also elements of the House version passed in 2003 as well as the recommendations made in 2002 by President Bush’s special education commission.

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In general, the bill seeks to:

- Ensure school safety and reasonable discipline;
- Give local schools more flexibility and greater control;
- Reduce paperwork and other burdensome regulations and costly litigation;
- Expand parents' choices and controls.

The bill also addresses teacher qualifications, transition issues and strengthens assistive technology and universal design recommendations. Since the bill addresses both Special Education and Early Intervention Programs, we will be working with the NYS Department of Health as well as the State Education Department to identify potential impact on New York State policy.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY TIPS COLUMN TO BEGIN IN NEXT ISSUE

Percy Williamson, Director of Transportation and Bruce Trzepacz, Fleet Manager for Aspire of WNY, gave a presentation on Transportation Safety and the Vehicle Defensive Driving Rodeo training program at the 2004 CP of NYS Annual Conference. They brought with them and displayed various slides that showed photos of their experience with Defensive Driving Rodeos as well as a specialized platform that is used for wheelchair securement training and to demonstrate the effectiveness of a secured wheelchair in hazardous situations. The session was very well received and those in attendance expressed an interest in having a way to regularly share information about transportation safety. The objective of the session was to further promote and provide leadership for the improvement of specialized transportation.

Mr. Williamson has agreed to write an occasional column about transportation safety for the *Affiliate Update*. That column, with tips provided by transportation experts at Affiliates across the state and other important safety information, will begin in our next issue.

The goals of the column, and this initiative as a whole, are ambitious. "We want to meet and work with other CP Affiliates' Transportation Administrators or Supervisors on issues related to improvement, efficiency and economy of specialized transportation," explains Mr. Williamson. "We want to organize a hands-on defensive vehicle/passenger training, in vehicle rodeo format, where drivers from other organizations can participate, share and receive driver improvement training. Aspire of WNY is entering its fourth year of promoting a Defensive Driving Rodeo workshop. We hope to stage a mini vehicle rodeo workshop with other Affiliates' Transportation Administrators and Supervisors for all to collaborate on the improvement and advancement of the components for passenger/driver/vehicle safety," said Mr. Williamson.

We encourage you to share questions and innovative solutions to transportation safety issues with Mr. Williamson at Aspire of WNY. His column will be informative and thought provoking and we hope that it creates an even safer transportation experience for all staff and consumers.