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MAJOR EVENTS LAST WEEK

U. S. Congress

The Congress was in recess. To date, six Republican Senators have announced their intent not to run for re-election. One, Senator Trent Lott (R-MS), has already resigned his seat. Twenty-six House members (six Democrats and twenty Republicans) won't be running for re-election due to death, running for the Presidency or the Senate, or simply retiring from the Congress. The Senate has been holding pro forma sessions about twice a week in order to prevent the President from making recess appointments.

Emergency Preparedness

The DPC developed [comments](#) on behalf of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regarding HHS' draft proposal of vaccine prioritization during times of pandemic flu. In our letter, we clearly articulated the experience of many people with disabilities who received suboptimal or no care during various disasters in recent history. We strongly urged that direct support professionals and family caregivers receive the same vaccine prioritization as health care professionals. We applauded the expectation that "at risk" individuals in the general population receive priority over individuals who are less susceptible, and posed a series of questions for the record regarding strategies to identify this population, administer the vaccine, and evaluate the initiative's success.

<http://www.thearc.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?&id=699>

Family Support

\$2 million dollars were appropriated in the FY 2008 Omnibus bill to fund a National Clearing House and Technical Assistance Center on Family Support. These funds are expected to *supplement* and not supplant monies for existing programs. The Senate report on the Omnibus bill states that this center will promote leadership by families of children with disabilities to design and improve family-centered and family-controlled programs. This is a huge victory especially given the difficulty Congress experienced in passing its appropriation bills with a focus on reduced spending.

Lobby Reform

The [Honest Leadership and Government Act of 2007 \(HLOGA\)](#) took effect on **January 1**. The new law establishes many new rules for the Congress itself and the entities that lobby the Congress. Groups like The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy will now need to file quarterly rather than semi annual reports on their lobbying activities.
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d110:h.r.02316>:

MAJOR EVENTS AHEAD

U. S. Congress

The Congress remains in recess. The House of Representatives will reconvene on January 15 and the Senate on January 22. Three day retreats by both parties will be held later in January.

The White House

President Bush will deliver his State of the Union Address on Monday, January 28. The Bush Administration will release its Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Request on February 4.

Medicaid

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is expected to publish a clarification to its December 28, 2007 *Federal Register* notice which appeared to announce the abolishment of its 10 regional offices. Aware that the notice had created some confusion, a CMS official indicated that the announcement was referring to internal organizational codes that have been abolished, not the regional offices.

Education

Tomorrow is the sixth anniversary of the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act. With the initial five year authorization already expired, the Congress and the Bush Administration are still far away from an agreement on how to improve the program and the outcomes for students. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings will lay out her policy goals for 2008 in an address on January 10 at the National Press Club. Check the Department's web site – www.ed.gov - for the text of her address after it is delivered.

Emergency Preparedness

The DPC will attend a two-day conference this week on emergency preparedness, response, and recovery for people with disabilities and special needs. This training and technical assistance conference brings together Federal, State, and local experts and is designed to discuss and problem-solve the challenges specific to people with disabilities during times of disaster. We will relay specific areas of concern and offer our expertise in current planning and future response.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Civil Rights/Accelerated Programs

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights recently issued a policy letter addressing students with disabilities' access to Accelerated Programs. Due to reports of schools and districts where qualified students with disabilities have been prevented from participating in these programs, or in some cases were required to give up services and accommodations in order to participate, the Office for Civil Rights reaffirmed its responsibility and commitment to uphold Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities receiving Federal financial assistance) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by entities of State and local government.) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Section 504 and Title II require that qualified students with disabilities be given the same opportunities to compete for and benefit from accelerated programs and classes as are given to students without disabilities. To read more see <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-20071226.html>