

## Hill lawmakers prep budgets for conference

### *Both plans promise to increase discretionary funds*

By Patti Mohr, written April 10, 2007 for Education Daily®

Though the escalating standoff between the **White House** and **Congress** over a supplemental spending bill has so far garnered all the media's attention, Washington insiders say the **House** and **Senate** budget resolutions are worthy of notice.

Not only do the proposals include enforcement mechanisms to keep mandatory spending and tax cuts from crowding out discretionary programs such as education, they also would enable lawmakers to increase spending for schools in 2008.

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"We are wildly happy with this budget resolution," said **Diane Shust**, the [National Education Association](#)'s director of government relations. "It is certainly superior to what we've had in the past."

Both resolutions, [H. Con. Res. 99](#) and [S. Con. Res. 21](#), call for considerable increases in domestic spending, thereby making more room in the budget for education.

Though Democrats faced many of the same fiscal constraints and internal party disputes that hamstrung the previous Congress, they were able to secure enough support to clear resolutions through both chambers before breaking the April 1 spring recess. Hill staffers are beginning to compare their competing plans in anticipation for conference negotiations that could start as early as next week.

### **Spending limits**

The budget resolution is significant because it sets the framework for the year's congressional tax and spending decisions.

Both budgets reflect an intention to invest more in education programs. The Senate's supplementary materials suggest the [Education Department](#) deserves \$62.3 billion. While the House did not detail an amount for ED, it suggested that education and training programs categorized as "Function 500" should receive \$8 billion more than **President Bush** would give them.

Stakeholders, however, might be disappointed to learn the proposals are merely advisory and do not oblige appropriators to follow the advice.

"I don't think it carries much weight at all," **James Horney**, the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)' director of federal fiscal policy, said of the suggestions.

What matters is how all the spending recommendations add up. The resolution limits how much Congress can spend in total in any given year.

"The only real power of the budget resolution is to set the discretionary cap," said **Brian Riedl**, budget analyst for the [Heritage Foundation](#). The **Appropriations** committees would still be able to allocate funds "however they wish as long as they stay under total discretionary caps."

The Senate would raise Bush's proposed \$930 billion spending cap by \$12.5 billion and assume policy changes to effectively raise Bush's cap by a total of \$19 billion. Though the House did not specify a cap on spending in its legislative language, its accompanying tables assume Congress will spend \$955 billion in fiscal year 2008 -- raising the ante \$25 billion above Bush's limit. Furthermore, the House would direct the increase to domestic spending.

"It's a great first step," said **Deborah Rigsby**, [National School Boards Association](#)'s director of federal legislation, adding that she hopes appropriators will follow the same direction.

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