

TRANSCRIPT: DEBT DEAL'S IMPACT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

HELEN BLANK: Hello everyone, in the middle of August, this is Helen Blank. Due to the large number of registered participants, callers' telephone lines will be muted during the conference. If you would like to ask a question of the speakers, please e-mail your question to romero@nwlc.org. Questions may be submitted at any time during the call. We have four speakers today, who will talk about the debt deal, more formally called the Budget Control Act of 2011, and its potential impact on funding for early childhood, as well as other crucial supports for children and families. Joining me today are Danielle Ewen, Director of Child Care and Early Education at CLASP, Adele Robinson, Deputy Executive Director at NAEYC, Harriet Dichter, National Director of the First Five Years Fund.

In our call today, we will provide an overview, definitions of what is an entitlement, versus discretionary programs, which Danielle will cover, how all of this fits in with congressional work for appropriations, funding levels for FY12, which Adele will cover, action steps that we recommend for FY12, and messages we think will resonate, which Harriet will cover and members of the Super Committee and their importance, so that you can also work to reach them, which I will cover.

As you have likely read, the Budget Control Act has mandated some very deep spending cuts over the next decade and created a process that will require more consensus or trigger additional discretionary cuts. The agreement begins with nearly \$1 trillion in discretionary spending cuts over ten years, beginning in FY 2012, enforced by binding annual paths or limits, through 2021. Congress will next have to make another \$1.2 trillion in cuts, to take effect over ten years, on top of that.

Here's where the process gets more complicated. A Super Committee, appointed by House and Senate party leaders, of members of Congress, will submit its recommendations by November 23rd. Congress is required to act on those recommendations by December 2nd. The committee can recommend any type of deficit reduction measure it wants. It can cut discretionary programs like Head Start, further, cut entitlement programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, child nutrition, and it can raise revenue. The Budget Act also requires a vote this fall, on a constitutional amendment that would require a balanced budget. The recommendations from the committee will move on a fast track process to the Congress, without any amendments. This means that only a majority of the Senate, as opposed to the 60 members that you are used to, are needed to pass the deal.

If Congress fails to enact the Joint Super Committee proposal, achieving at least \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction over the next ten years, automatic across the board cuts in many programs would

occur. This process is known as sequestration. Sequestration will occur automatically if the committee does not report out the required legislation or, if Congress defeats the legislation, if the President vetoes the legislation and it is sustained, or to the extent that the legislation is enacted to cut the deficit by less than \$1.2 trillion. The sequester if no other cuts are made is expected to result in a 9 percent cut in non-defense programs. It would not take place until fiscal year 2013. Safety net programs, such as food stamps, Medicaid, TANF, child nutrition and mandatory child care spending, are exempt from the automatic cuts, but not from cuts through the joint committee's recommendations. Discretionary programs, which Danielle will describe, are not exempt from sequestration.

Bob Greenstein, at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, has commented that this process is designed to resist raising revenues and has the potential for even deeper spending cuts down the line, further harming the economy. Danielle will help us understand what early childhood programs fall into what category of the budget, so you will be able to follow and impact the process as it unfolds.

DANIELLE EWEN: Thank you Helen. Let me start by saying that each of us will have on our websites additional information to help you follow this as we move along because we know it's confusing. We know that even though many of you already understand how early childhood is funded; we thought a quick review would be helpful as we discuss the full impact of the act.

As you know, federal spending for child care, Head Start and other early childhood programs is divided into three categories, like all spending in the Federal Government: discretionary spending, mandatory or capped entitlement spending, and entitlement spending. Almost all of our most important early childhood programs are discretionary programs, which have to be voted on by Congress every year. All of Head Start spending and part of CCDBG is discretionary. Title I, which school districts can use to fund early childhood programs, as well as IDEA and Parts B and C of IDEA and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which funds after school activities, are also discretionary, as are programs like WIC, which provides food to young mothers and their children.

Approximately \$2 billion of CCDBG is funded as a discretionary program. CCDBG also has a unique aspect in that the remaining \$7 billion of child care funds that come through CCDBG are mandatory funding or are TANF dollars that have been either transferred to CCDBG or used for child care directly, without being transferred. These dollars are under the jurisdiction of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee, and are not voted on every year because they are mandatory dollars. The Child and Adult Care Food Program, which provides important funding for healthy meals for children in child care every day, is an entitlement program. It is available to all children who are eligible for meals and snacks, without a ceiling. But each of these kinds of programs may be under the jurisdiction of the Super Committee, so it's really important to know what we're talking about as we move forward.

HELEN BLANK: Adele, can you talk about the FY 2012 appropriations process and a bit more about how this deal affects appropriations over time.

ADELE ROBINSON: Great, thank you everyone. This comes just as Congress is finishing its regular appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2012, which can often seem confusing. They are supposed to finish appropriations by the end of September, but as you know, that process can drag on and on, beyond the deadline. That is usually when we put out information about a CR or a Continuing Resolution. The picture for discretionary funding, that is funding through the appropriations process, under the Budget Control Act, is not particularly good. It is better for the first two fiscal years, 2012 and 2013, because there is a firewall between security and non-security streams. This means that all of the cuts cannot come from non-security programs.

However, after two years, this firewall disappears. Then, a greater percentage or all of the cuts needed to meet deficit targets in the later year could come from non-security programs. The act provides funding to protect increases in Pell grants, but not for other programs such as Head Start and child care. If no new revenue is raised, it makes the threat of cuts to discretionary programs even greater.

So as we said, Congress is required to deal with appropriations or pass a Continuing Resolution by midnight, September 30th. While the Budget Act provides more overall funding level this year than the Ryan Budget that was passed in the House--- you will probably remember the alerts on HR-1. The Appropriations Committee still has approximately \$2.5 billion less left for non-security discretionary programs. There is also nothing in the Budget Act that prevents the Congress from making even deeper cuts in discretionary programs, beyond those that are in the deal.

HELEN BLANK: Thanks Adele. Harriet is now going to talk about activity around the appropriations process, and then I'm going to come back to actions around the Super Committee.

HARRIET DICHTER: Thank you Helen. So as you can see, there are many different fronts for our work, and they can be a little bit confusing. So first off, we want to emphasize that we have to convince members of the Appropriations Committee to continue to invest additional funds in child care and Head Start for Fiscal Year 2012. Even with the overall cuts that we've been discussing, they can choose to increase, to freeze, or to cut specific programs such as child care and Head Start. Now you all play a very important role in convincing members of Congress. Right now, members are home on recess until early September. This is an excellent time to reach out to them in their offices, to invite them to visit programs or for you to attend their town hall meetings or other events, so that you are able to remind them why child care and Head Start are important to young children, to their families, and to the overall economic health of our communities.

So let's talk for a minute about messages. Let's start by focusing on two big ones; first the economic argument and second, the education argument. Please keep in mind that I know that most of you are very experienced at this, and you want to combine stories with the data when you're giving your message.

So let's turn to the economic argument first. Child care, Head Start, and other early childhood programs, have a near-term payoff for the economy. The resources from our programs like child care and TANF go quickly back into the economy and they do help to stimulate local economies. You also know that our early childhood programs assist our parents in many, many ways. They help them to stay on the job, so that they can support their own children.

Second, beyond the compelling short and long-term economic benefit from this investments, don't forget to remind members about the compelling research and evidence that proves that investing in quality early childhood education yields substantial results over time, and includes a big impact on economic productivity and on competitiveness. So we know, and this is the overall message frame for us, that investing in early childhood helps us to build a smarter country, a healthier country and a stronger country.

I think all of us know, from where we sit, that we are in a crisis now in terms of a public sector approach. We've got to help our elected officials to understand that this is a genuine crisis for families in your district and for states, and that the crisis actually gets bigger if we cannot count on Congress, in their unique roles as our elected officials to, at a minimum, sustain funding levels for child care and for Head Start. And of course you've already heard me and others say, that from a perspective of really aiding our families and our children, we actually to significantly grow these investments.

Now a number of groups have tools to help you with the messaging and to guide you in working with elected officials, so let's start with showcasing local programs. You can check out websites from the Early Care and Education Consortium and the National Head Start Association, to see toolkits for being able to support you for doing visits. In addition, you can check out the website of the First Five Years Fund, for looking at sample op-ed pieces, press releases and letters to the editor, and Helen has also posted these materials to the website of the National Women's Law Center. We do know people have been using some of those materials and they have succeeded in getting things into local press, so we do urge you to take a look at them. Now is a very good time for you to get going and to raise your voice in favor of these programs. Again, the members are home and so it's not sleepy August, it's actually active August time, so we really want to urge everyone to take advantage of what's available to them and to use that time well.

Helen is now going to talk about the Super Committee and the unifying message that we think will work to give this group and members of Congress, along with our very specific early childhood focus.

HELEN BLANK: Thanks Harriet. We're all in this fight together and we will need to work with all our allies to ensure that the debt deal does not make low income families and children bear the brunt of the cutbacks. The members of the Super Committee that you will need to focus on, as well as your own members, include Senator John Kerry from Massachusetts, Max Baucus from Montana, Jon Kyl from Arizona, Rob Portman from Ohio, Pat Toomey from Pennsylvania, and the co-chair, Patty Murray from Washington State. On the House side, Representative Jeb Hensarling of Texas will be the co-chair, and joined by David Camp and Fred Upton, both of Michigan, Xavier Becerra from California, James Clyburn from South Carolina and Chris Van Hollen from Maryland.

Don't despair if you do not have a member from your state on the Super Committee. You still have a role as an advocate. Follow alerts from national organizations, about how your own members can relay messages to Super Committee members. We are going to work very hard to get out message out in this very confusing and complicated environment. It will be important for all groups working

for children and families, to have a unified message and to talk about three main points as we work to influence the Super Committee and other members of Congress. One, we must raise revenues. Two, we cannot cut safety net programs and three, we must create more jobs. Without a very strong counterbalance on the need for more revenues, we will be back in a position of more cuts to key programs, including discretionary programs like Head Start and child care. Without a comprehensive message around safety net programs, that should include a message about the value of early learning, low- income programs could bear the brunt of the cuts. Without a focus on creating jobs, we will never get out of these economic doldrums, which help to create an environment that does not allow us to invest in the supports like early childhood, that we know children need. It will be essential not to pit one key program for low income children against another.

There is an easy way for you to get more involved in this larger process. The SAVE for All Coalition is coordinating visits to members on the budget deal in Washington, and inviting state or local advocates who work on particular issues to participate by phone. They are also coordinating field activities that will likely include in-district meetings, state sign-on letters and press opportunities. If you want to be linked into these efforts, please contact Melanie Ross Levin at the National Women's Law Center; mrosslevin@nwlc.org. In addition, follow national organizations' alerts about the process. Danielle, can you help us wrap up?

DANIELLE EWEN: Of course, I'm happy to. I'm going to facilitate some questions, and as you all might imagine, we have lots of them coming in, because this is very, very complicated. Before I move into the question, I want to remind you that if you do have a question, you can e-mail it to Rio Romero at rromero@nwlc.org, and we will make sure that we get to it.

So here is our first question. Helen and Adele, both of you, in your comments, reference that there could be cuts under the agreement in FY 2012. Do we know what those cuts will be and how they're apportioned?

HELEN BLANK: The cuts in FY 2012 come through the appropriations process that both Adele and Harriet talked about. The cuts are about \$2.5 billion for all appropriations. We do not know how they have been apportioned. In the past, they have fallen heavily on the committee responsible for child care and Head Start. Congress will have to decide, how they're apportioned among the various Committees and the House and the Senate will then have to make decisions about particular programs, so there is a big role for advocates in this process.

DANIELLE EWEN: And in a related question Adele, you mentioned that it would be a 9 percent security and 9 percent non-security cut, that's what people have been talking about. Can you talk about how that 9 percent, those figures have been arrived at? Do you have any idea?

ADELE ROBINSON: I'm going to let Helen talk more about that.

HELEN BLANK: It's an estimate that national groups have made, by looking at the \$1 trillion dollars that the Super Committee has to cut and calculating how much would have to be sequestered each year if there is no agreement on any cuts by the Super Committee.

ADELE ROBINSON: Also remember again, we told you earlier about this firewall. This is a 10-year deal. The firewall is only good for the first two years.

DANIELLE EWEN: Remind people what firewall you mean.

ADELE ROBINSON: A portion of the cuts have to come from security as well as non-security. So it's important to realize, this is a long-term deal. The protection drops off after two years, where much more could come from the non-security, if not all. That is why we're also asking you to be active on the revenue side as well.

HELEN BLANK: Ironically, if there's a sequester though, half the cuts will come from defense programs. There are so many moving pieces in this.

DANIELLE EWEN: Adele, thank you for bringing that up. We do have a question about how to do advocacy around raising revenue. Helen?

HELEN BLANK: We realize that we have talked to many of you about advocacy around raising revenue for many years. It's been a major focus for the National Women's Law Center. And when I saw that question, I realized what would be helpful for many of you is a special conference call or webinar on this topic, with Joan Entmacher, and we will do that more likely in September.

DANIELLE EWEN: Great. Harriet, one of our advocates has pointed out that folks are already being inundated with a variety of messages around this process. What is the best thing for them to do? Obviously, we all have information. What are we recommending as advocacy as we move forward? What should people be focusing on?

HARRIET DICHTER: We want people on this call, who are on the call because of their leadership roles for the early childhood community, to keep in mind that the core missions for the early childhood community and doing this work is to focus on the benefit and the need to sustain and grow and protect the early childhood programs. So in the thick of this, that's where people need to center their work and center their communication and their work with their elected officials. As we've talked about, every elected official matters. We gave everyone the names of the people on the Super Committee but the fact is, all of the members of Congress are there because we elected them, and they all will have a contribution, so we want to make sure that we're clear and insistent about the programs that are meaningful, and that we are clear and insistent that what we need is not to be reducing the scope of these programs, but to sustaining and if not growing them.

DANIELLE EWEN: Great. And earlier Harriet, we have a question, whether we just want people to be writing letters and calling their members of Congress, whether there's local action they should be taking as well.

HARRIET DICHTER: Local action is a really terrific idea. Right now, members of Congress are home, and so they are out conducting outreach and meeting with constituents, and so we would urge people to take a look, to see what proactively your members of Congress are doing, and make sure that you are a good voice for these issues at those meetings and likewise, now is a good time, basically to make sure that you are engaging them person to person, site visits, other strategies. So

there's really ample opportunity here, and I think - I'm sorry that we can't open the call so people can share stories, but I think if we were able to open the call, what we'd have is people being able to share that when people do develop deeper relationships and face-to-face contact, easier to be heard, and that it really helps to cultivate members as champions for this work.

DANIELLE EWEN: Helen, I know NWLC has been following the details of the agreement really closely. We have two or three technical questions, so I'm going to throw them to you first and you can see whether we can do it. The first one is, does the Super Committee have to come to consensus?

HELEN BLANK: No, it actually does not have to come to a consensus. You've noticed how hard it is for anyone to come to consensus, even about what day it is, in Washington lately, and that's when we would get into the sequester, and that is what is challenging. As I talked about, if they don't come to consensus, there will be a sequester, which involves an across the board cut of all discretionary programs, both non-security and security. The FY12 appropriations process will not be affected by the sequester but if the committee doesn't agree, the sequester will begin for FY 2013.

ADELE ROBINSON: And what we mean by "agree," is seven of the twelve must agree not all twelve.

HELEN BLANK: Right, there has to be a majority of the committee.

DANIELLE EWEN: And Helen, also following, you mentioned that there's a required vote on a balanced budget amendment. Can you tell people briefly, what that means, because I think people are very concerned about that.

HELEN BLANK: If you followed the process in Washington, you know that we had votes on the balanced budget amendment this year, and we've had many in past years. A balanced budget is extremely dangerous, because it means huge cuts in programs, and it's extremely unrealistic. The conditions under the balanced budget would be very, very, very tight. You may think a lot is going on and you're going to be getting a lot of alerts about the Super Committee, and all of a sudden at some point in September or October, you're going to get national organizations telling you to once more, call your member of Congress and tell them not to vote on a balanced budget amendment. Just because the balanced budget amendment did not pass the Senate this year already, does not mean that we're not going to need a lot of field activity and a lot of organizations calling their members and individuals calling their members and telling them to vote no on the balanced budget amendment.

DANIELLE EWEN: And if the balanced budget amendment manages to pass both Houses of Congress, does it become law?

HELEN BLANK: Then it has to go out to the states, because it's a constitutional amendment.

DANIELLE EWEN: And they'll have to do advocating in their own states.

HELEN BLANK: That would be a lot of work. We're hoping you stave this off in the Senate so you don't have to do that, because that would be a nightmare.

DANIELLE EWEN: And following up with the technical details of the agreement, for all of us, someone has asked whether we have an opinion on what is a better approach. Whether the Super Committee comes to an agreement or whether we go to sequester, is there something better for the programs that serve low- income families?

ADELE ROBINSON: I think it's really way too early to start negotiating with ourselves, and that I really think we have to keep our eye on the ball. This is going to be - we will keep saying this over and over again, very fluid. We'll all need to be very nimble about it, and as things move forward, we can start to adjust and make those decisions. But let's not choose the worst of two results; let's prevent the evils from coming.

HELEN BLANK: The person who asked that also listed a lot of programs that were actually all discretionary, that would be sequestered, such as Title I and WIC and Head Start and child care and LIHEAP. So this is extremely challenging and as Adele said, we don't know what the solution that's going to be presented by the Super Committee is yet. So again, it is way too early and inappropriate to say that one is better than the other.

DANIELLE EWEN: And just continuing. Helen, can you highlight one more time, the fact that this is not just about one side of the budget. The discretionary and mandatory are on the table with the Super Committee and what that really means for a couple of programs.

HELEN BLANK: We have an overall ceiling for discretionary programs that involves a deep cut that was part of the deal for discretionary programs. Danielle described what those discretionary programs could be. That is automatic, that \$1 trillion cuts over a period of years. The Super Committee can do whatever it pleases. It could say, we are not raising any revenues, we are not closing any loopholes, and we are going to get to that \$1.5 or a minimum \$1.2 trillion by cutting discretionary programs more. Whether they'll get into specifics is a little unlikely, but they could say, we want to add another \$1 trillion cut to discretionary programs. Regardless of the sequester, it can cut discretionary programs and it can cut all those capped entitlement and entitlement programs that Danielle talked about as well. It's really no holds barred in the Super Committee.

DANIELLE EWEN: One of our wonderful advocates has asked the same question in a different way, which is will it be possible to protect what we have for low- income children and their families throughout this process? So can each of you all talk about the advocacy items that we'll be developing, the messaging again Harriet, what our plan is as we move forward, to make sure that those programs specifically for low income families, are at the forefront of what we protect in this effort.

HARRIET DICHTER: So we talked a little bit about the SAVE Coalition, and that's all of the human resources programs, in addition to early childhood nutrition and home assistance and other health care programs. At the broader level, there is the SAVE Coalition for the bigger, broader message about low- income programs. Then of course we count on your expertise, to be able to show members of Congress quite literally, in programs, as well as meetings and town halls, what

this would mean specifically for those programs serving young children and their families, and those can be done not only through your visits at home, but as the SAVE Coalition, we're all in D.C. doing visits on the Hill, they can bring you in by phone to your members or Senators' meetings, to tell the story about the impact locally.

Some of the others would be for instance, the op-eds and the letters to the editor on both the First Five Years Fund and National Women's Law Center page. And then just being clear that you are constantly collecting the data and the stories, to update on the impact of what's going on now and what's at stake if it's lost.

HELEN BLANK: Let me be clear that we realize there are so many things going on at the same time. Harriet and Adele talked about FY12 and specifically on the FY12 appropriations process, which will start when Congress comes back in September and they're thinking about right now. We want you to talk very clearly about increasing funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, \$1.2 billion, and a \$536 million increase in Head Start. When you need to act regarding the Super Committee's deliberations, follow people's alerts. Don't tell your Super Committee members or don't tell your own members to tell the Super Committee right now, not to cut child care or not to cut Head Start, because we don't think right this minute, child care or Head Start or TANF is on the Super Committee's agenda. You may have seen some alerts about food stamps and you know that that's been brought up. You can tell the super committee not to cut low-income programs like child care, but we're not telling you to launch a massive campaign around child care to the Super Committee. We want to get a feeling of what's going on in terms of exactly what the message is, whether there ought to be a real specific effort on the Super Committee, around early childhood programs.

HARRIET DICHTER: The only thing I want to add here, is that during this time, what's really important to understand to the core question, what effort is it going to take, and basically try to preserve, if not grow, the programs that we know have these beneficial effects. The level of effort it's going to take is everyone giving focused time and attention, and not making the assumption that someone else is doing the work to try to educate and engage the members of Congress. And so I think Helen and Adele have both touched on the fact that the groups in D.C. are going to be working very hard and working as collaboratively as possible, to try to advance this agenda.

Likewise basically, for everyone who is on this call, for you and all of the networks that you're part of and help to lead and to organize, I just think it's critical to remember yes, it's confusing, but we have a core set of messages here. We know why these programs are beneficial, we know why they have to be sustained if not grown, and we have to basically keep reiterating that message. There is a lot of competition basically. There are a lot of programs out there, there are a lot of interests people have, and so it is just of critical importance that people take the time, basically to take the actions and to try to pay attention as we attempt to sort and sift, to see what's in the moment, but to keep going and to ask yourself, what have I done this week? What have I done this month as a leader and with the rest of my network?

And the only other thing I was going to mention that I think is important, because I know many people on the call have partners. You may have business partners, you may have high level citizens are partners, you may have other, and you can play a helpful role in also reminding them and working with them, about the importance of communicating not just again, that early childhood

matters, but that also, we need to preserve and protect the funding levels. We shouldn't get into this on the theory that we should just take a little haircut for early childhood.

DANIELLE EWEN: I would add that one of the most important things to take out of this call is that everything is in flux, and whereas usually, we are able to give you a roadmap and a timeline about what's going to happen and what the potential negative consequences are. Right now we don't know what the timeframe is; we don't know what the order of how these things are going to work is. Appropriations for the next fiscal year and the Super Committee activities are eventually going to be interwoven. We just can't predict exactly what messages and what activities are going to be needed when, in this process. The only thing we can predict is that it's going to be very intense. We're going to need a lot of actions, as Harriet just said, and we're going to need actions in a variety of ways, on a variety of programs, which is why the SAVE for All Coalition is a really great way to get involved for the high level messaging and the high level activities that are going to be organized across the state.

I think we have another question related to this Adele, that I'm going to throw to you. Is there a plan for the kinds of revenues or cuts that progressives will get around, or have we started talking about those kinds of things?

ADELE ROBINSON: You've heard the administration put out some suggestions and you've heard others say that they know there needs to be a tax reform overhaul, and those are vaguer. I don't think we can identify which are the more likely or unlikely of those revenue suggestions or cuts. I think the important thing right now is constantly reminding people what revenue does, where revenue comes from and how revenue benefits these programs. If all we do is discuss cuts, that's all we're going to do. We'll never invest; we'll always be on a downward trajectory. Revenues include things like closing certain deductions or certain credits. It's not just about the amount of taxes paid by people at different income levels. So this is going to also be a very up and down and all around identification process that overall, just like with the balanced budget amendment, we can't do a balancing of the needs of a stronger, healthier, better educated America, by cutting the very things that make us healthier, stronger and better educated. Everyone needs to be putting in some of the revenue pot, so that we can all steer this forward together.

DANIELLE EWEN: And one of our optimistic advocates wants to know Adele, could the Super Committee decide to do this all through revenue generation?

ADELE ROBINSON: That is certainly within their purview. We think that given the makeup of the committee, highly unlikely, but we are hearing from both sides of the aisle, people who have generally voted against closing loopholes or raising revenues in other ways, a little softening. So we have to work on that softening and get it even softer and move more people to understand the balancing, the fair balancing that's needed between revenue raising and looking at existing programs for cuts.

DANIELLE EWEN: Great. And we have another question. Given the focus on the Super Committee members and the focus on trying to highlight early childhood, is there, either among the Super Committee or elsewhere, is there a real champion for early childhood in Congress who are going to carry our messages?

HELEN BLANK: It's very interesting, because the co-chair of the Super Committee is Patty Murray, who was herself, an early childhood teacher, and who is very, very supportive and well understands the importance of investing in young children and their families. John Kerry is also a tremendous supporter of early childhood. I don't think everyone realizes this because people had always focused on Ted Kennedy as being the children's advocate from Massachusetts. John Kerry has introduced very many bills affecting early childhood. He introduced a bill that was similar to Smart Start. He fought very hard when Congress was working on a tobacco bill, to have a set aside for child care, and he just now reintroduced a bill that would increase the mandatory funding for child care and ensure that there were minimum standards on child care funded by TANF. So you have two out of the three Democrats being longstanding advocates for early childhood, and Senator Baucus does sit on the Committee that is responsible for the child care mandatory funds and has worked on welfare bills that affect those child care mandatory dollars. In addition, we have Tom Harkin, who is not on the Super Committee but is the chair of the HELP Committee and has been supportive of early childhood, and Barbara Mikulski who is the new chair of the Subcommittee for Children and Families. She is much more interested in early childhood, and we know Senator Casey and many others such as Senator Franken. Some of the newer members of the Senate have made early childhood one of their top priorities. So we have some good advocates on our side but as Harriet has said, and all of us constantly say, they've got to hear from you to stiffen up their spines.

HARRIET DICHTER: And I just want to add as a kudos, because I hope they're on the call that the early childhood advocates in the state of Washington, sent a congratulatory note to Senator Murray, the day that she was appointed, and they focused on early childhood. So that's good actions basically, and so that's the kind of thing we're talking about, like look for all those relationships and take action.

DANIELLE EWEN: Great. And following up on the take action, someone picked up on the fact that there are cuts in fiscal '12 that are mandated in the Act. Are there risks to child care and Head Start under the upcoming appropriations year?

ADELE ROBINSON: You know there is a set pot of money and it's hard at this point to know what the individual program by program decisions will be. Some could be increased and therefore some could be decreased, or there could be a freeze. We also realize that while we make get through markup, we're very likely to be at a continuing resolution, and we want to make sure that a continuing resolution will be no less than a freeze at that point. But in essence, we can't tell you anything on a program by program level until they do the markup, which we think will be in September, on both the House and Senate side, for the Labor HHS Education Bill, which has our main programs. At that point, we'll have a better sense of which direction this is going on Head Start, Child Care, Challenge Fund and other programs for fiscal year 2012.

HELEN BLANK: But if you remember how strong you were, the early childhood advocates were amazing last year and in an appropriation, that bill that cut many, many programs, we managed, with your incredible work, to have an increase for Head Start, a modest increase for Child Care, and funding for the Early Learning Challenge Fund. So as Adele said, we don't know how they're going to divide up the funds, but we know that Denny Rehberg, the new chair on the House side, is

concerned about early childhood. He was in a Head Start program this week or last week, and so we and you have to keep pushing increasing funding for early childhood, for Head Start and Child Care, for FY12, to the Appropriations Committee and to your members.

DANIELLE EWEN: We had a question broadly about talking points, and I just wanted to underline the fact that a number of groups have put out talking points about the broad issues. The SAVE for All Campaign has some really, really good pieces, through the Coalition on Human Needs, about why a balanced budget amendment would be bad policy for the country, particularly for low income families, and I urge everybody to look at those as we're having these appropriations. Each of the groups on the phone and others, have talking points and pieces that will help in the conversation around advocacy for early childhood. SAVE for All has a number of pieces about revenue, and Helen has said that NWLC will do a webinar in September about revenues. So for those of you that are desperate for talking points, there are places to get them. If you can't find them, send one of us an e-mail and we'll make sure that we connect you with those as well.

We have another question that relates to money, which is what is the status of reauthorization for Child Care, and in a year for Head Start, if there's no money on the table? Harriet, you're nodding, so go ahead and take the first shot.

HARRIET DICHTER: Well, all of those things of course, are uncertain, but I would say and remind people of, is that there are responsibilities in Congress, not only to fund programs, but to deal with the policy frames, and so we people should continue to be on the lookout basically, for the policy frames and reauthorization. We do expect there to be at least some discussion on the Senate side in the fall, about reauthorization of the Child Care Block Grant, and that will provide some good forums basically, hopefully, for engaging and educating members, on helping them to know and deepen their commitment to these programs. I think that people may have seen that the prospect for progress on ESEA, prior to the presidential election, are basically all but over, and so we don't want - we want to be forthright about that. At the same time, having people to know and understand that there will be opportunities in the future, so we shouldn't stop attending to what's in the underlying laws and knowing them and thinking about how they need to be shaped and reshaped, basically when the opportunities arise. But I think what we would say is, people have had a hard time focusing just on these issues around funding levels, and that seems to take up a lot of the space and energy of the members of Congress, and that probably is where most of the deeper debate and discussion will be heading over the course of the next several months. If anybody wants to add in more.

DANIELLE EWEN: At this time, we don't have any more questions, so Helen, do you want to move on to the next part of our conversation?

HARRIET BLANK: Sure. Adele, can you recap the immediate next steps for us?

ADELE ROBINSON: Sure. It always bears repeating, to always commit to calling your members of Congress, your House and Senate, as we tell you as things bubble up in either body. Tell them to increase investments in the fiscal year 2012 appropriations for Child Care and Head Start. Tell them that Child Care, Head Start, Early Head Start; help us build a smarter, healthy and stronger America. That you can do at any time, because as we're ramping up into the September markups,

the more they hear from you about an increased investment in fiscal year 2012, that would be great. As we've mentioned, the First Five Years Fund and on the National Women's Law Center sites, are some templates for some op-eds or letters to the editor for your local papers, that you could use.

If you want to join the broader coalition level about all low income programs, early childhood plus, contact Melanie at the National Women's Law Center. She's at mrosslevin@nwlc.org, and she'll connect you to the SAVE Coalition and its broader efforts. As always, make sure that you're collecting data, as well as stories, showing the impact of these programs in your states and communities. As we've mentioned before, because this is such a fluid situation, because there is no fixed timeline before the November 23rd deadline for the super committee report, you'll just have to stay alert and stay tuned for the things that we update you with, and when we ask you to contact either the Appropriations, or to influence the super committee. I wish we could give you exact dates and times, but that's not really possible now.

HELEN BLANK: Thanks Adele, thanks Danielle, thanks Harriet. What a team. Thank you everyone for joining us today. All participants in today's call will receive an e-mail in the next few days, with an audio file and links to additional information about the budget and appropriations process. We'll also be putting a written transcript on our website. If you have additional questions, please feel free to send them to us at hblank@nwlc.org, and I'll share them with Danielle, Harriet and Adele, and we'll answer them to the best of our ability. You've had a lot of information, but please don't forget that your members of Congress are home for the next several weeks. Make sure that they hear from you and your network. As we've all said during this call, make sure that they hear from you in the next several months. We know that there are people who would like the Super Committee to have no increase in revenues, who aren't very concerned about low income programs and they will be very noisy. We're going to do our best to make this as easy as it can be for you. You will be getting a lot of e-mails. We know you would rather not get so many e-mails, but please read them and please respond, because someone else, who will be responding, is going to be asking their members to do what we know is not in the best interests of the country, not in the best interests of our future, and not in the best interests of our children and families.

I think all of you for all of the work that you do for children and families. We've been very successful in moving that needle on early childhood, so we have to keep it up. It's not the best of times but we've got to keep moving forward. Thanks everybody.

END TRANSCRIPT