

Washington Update December 21, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

This is my last Washington Update for 2018. Thank you for your readership and for the many notes and comments I receive from you in response to the blog. Please keep them coming! Wishing you a joyful holiday and a new year filled with opportunity.

1. Washington DC Becomes Dysfunction Junction for the Holidays: Shutdown Down to the Wire

It's almost 8 pm – four hours before a substantial portion of the government will shut down if the Congress and the White House can't cut a deal. Yesterday resolution looked promising as the House passed a bill that would keep all of the government open through Feb. 8, punting final determination about the controversial border wall to the 116th Congress and the Democratic controlled House. But President Trump appeared to change gears – after earlier signaling that he would sign that bill, he decided he would not and sent the House back into session to pass a partisan spending bill that includes the \$5 billion for the border wall with Mexico through January 3 – the first day of Democratic control of the House. The Senate does not appear to be ready to pass that bill, as the Republicans would need to find at least 9 Democrats to vote for it to reach the required 60 vote majority. That is most unlikely.

Legislators and White House representatives are deep in back door negotiating conversations that look to continue until the midnight deadline. So stay tuned. Once again the education advocates are counting their blessings; the education spending bill was passed in the fall and runs through September 30, 2019.

2. Trump Administration School Safety Commission Releases Report Calling for the End to Discipline Guidance: Two Days later the Guidance is Withdraw

On Wednesday this week the Federal School Safety Commission, chaired by Sec. DeVos, issued their report with recommendations on how to fight future school shootings. The 180 page report offers a raft of commentary, none of which addresses how to limit access to guns in general. In fact, as expected, more guns appear to be part of the equation. Some key items in the report include:

- Eliminate Obama school-discipline guidance

This was expected and has engendered outrage from most education and civil rights quarters, in addition to leading Democrats in Congress. The 2014 guidance was designed to address the disproportionately higher rates of school discipline for students of color and/or students with disabilities. The guidance notes that schools may be found in violation of civil

rights laws if they enforce discriminatory rules, even when the intention is not discriminatory but the impact is.

Notably, AASA, the superintendents association, issued a statement indicating that the guidance had only resulted in changes in 16% of school districts and its repeal would not have much impact. At 3 pm today – the Friday before the long holiday break – Sec. DeVos issued a statement that the guidance has been rescinded. She said “In too many instances...I’ve heard from teachers and advocates that the previous administration’s discipline guidance often led to school environments where discipline decisions were based on student’s race and where statistics became more important than the safety of students and teachers.”

- School districts should consider arming “specially selected and trained” school staff
- Support for mental health services and strategies in schools, but no recommendations for new funding
- Districts should make schools “harder” targets

<https://edtrust.org/press-release/statement-from-former-u-s-education-secretaries-john-b-king-jr-and-arne-duncan-on-trump-administration-recommended-rollback-of-discipline-guidance/>

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rulesforengagement/2018/12/heres_what_the_end_of_obam_a-era_discipline_guidance_means_for_schools.html

<https://www.educationnext.org/dont-walk-back-needed-discipline-reform-forum-losen/>

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/12/trump-safety-commission-devos-guidance-](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/12/trump-safety-commission-devos-guidance-guns.html?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=campaignk-12)

[guns.html?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=campaignk-12](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/12/trump-safety-commission-devos-guidance-guns.html?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=campaignk-12)

<https://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/media/press-releases/ranking-member-scott-statement-on-the-school-safety-commission-report>

3. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) Announces He Will Not Run Again

After three terms in the U.S. Senate, Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chair of the HELP Committee, has announced that he will not seek re-election in 2020. Many speculate that his impending retirement will add pressure for a reauthorization of the Higher Education within the next two years, as that would be a great accomplishment for him before his departure. That will certainly be a big hill to climb, however, particularly as the Democrats will take over the House in 2019 and intense partisanship is likely to remain the hallmark of that body. But Alexander, in partnership with Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), is largely credited with providing the leadership to craft and pass the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 -- a bipartisan feat which few thought possible. So perhaps another victory is in the offing.

Alexander's experience in education is notable – former Secretary of Education for President H.W. Bush, former governor of Tennessee and former college President. “He’s had more extensive and relevant experience with colleges and universities than any member of Congress has ever had,” Terry Hartle, Vp for the American Council on Education said.

The next Republican Senator in line for the top spot on the HELP Committee is Sen. Mike Enzi (R-WY), who chaired the Committee once before. Following him in seniority are Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) and Sen. Johnny Isaakson (R-GA).

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2018/12/lamar-alexander-no-reelection-congress-2020-leading-republican-education.html?utm_source=feedblitz&utm_medium=FeedBlitzRss&utm_campaign=campaignk-12

4. New Resource for Educators

- **Child Trends** is out with a new analysis of disparities in out-of-school suspension data finding while there has been progress in closing the gaps, they remain high.
<https://www.childtrends.org/schools-report-fewer-out-of-school-suspensions-but-gaps-by-race-and-disability-persist>

I hope your New Year's Resolutions include tweeting more! See you there @janewestdc.

Best,

Jane