

Washington Update February 2, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

With such a packed agenda you would think Congress would be busy at work....But don't forget, it's an election year.

1. Government Shutdown Looming Again for February 8

Since the last government shutdown just last month, Congress has continued to angst over the same issues that resulted in the stalemate with no resolution on the horizon. Unable to resolve DACA and immigration changes and unable to come to agreement on lifting budget caps, Congress appears to be poised for a fifth short term "continuing resolution" which would fund the government through March 22. With the current short term funding bill ending next Thursday talk of a shutdown is muted, as neither Democrats nor Republicans feel like such a move scores political points for them. However, the conservative Freedom Caucus in the House is a fly in the ointment, balking that they may not support a fifth short term extension without an increase in defense spending. Including such an increase without a comparable increase for non-discretionary domestic spending would lose Democratic votes in the Senate and, thus, doom the extension.

For most of this week House and Senate Republicans have been at their retreat in West Virginia, thus limiting business days for Congress to two. Next week, on Wednesday, the House and Senate Democrats head off to their retreat on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, again limiting the days in session to two. It appears that the House will attempt to pass the fifth short term spending bill on Tuesday going through March 22. That would mean that the Senate would have only Tuesday to take it up as they will be out of session the rest of the week.

Meanwhile, with the State of the Union Address this week, President Trump began the kick off of the FY 2019 Fiscal year. His budget proposal is due out February 12. Often the State of the Union address foreshadows priorities for the budget. However, it is hard to tell if that will be the case this year for education. For example, despite school choice and vouchers being a priority for this Administration, there was no mention of this in the speech. Likewise, his focus on vocational education, asking Congress to "invest in workforce development and job training" and "open great vocational schools" runs counter to last year's budget proposal which called for cutting career and technical education more than \$1 billion.

See: <https://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-washington-post/20180202/281822874241852>

2. Higher Education Act Reauthorization Update

This week the Senate HELP Committee held its third hearing in preparation for rewriting the Higher Education Act. Next week a fourth hearing will be held on considering the

costs of attending higher education. In what appears to be less-than-bipartisan moves, Committee Chair Sen. Alexander (R-TN) and Ranking Member Sen. Murray (D-WA) issued dueling sets of principles for reauthorization. Sen. Alexander's release is a white paper drafted by his staff, the goal of which is get input from higher education stakeholders.

Highlights of the paper released by Sen. Alexander:

Background:

- The Higher Education Act dates back to 1965; it has been reauthorized 8 times, the last time being in 2008
- The paper provides an overview of current federal accountability requirements and considers possibilities for updating the measures
- The goal is to update accountability measures for higher education to ensure that students are receiving an education worth their time and money
- The strategy is to modernize and simplify federal requirements for institutions of higher education to participate in the federal student loan program by creating more effective accountability measures related to the repayment of federal student loans.
- In 2016-17, the federal government provided about \$123 billion in financial aid for about 13 million students in college

Principles for an Updated Accountability System

- Return on investment for students and tax payers matters
- The federal government should not promote access to programs and institutions where students leave with excessive debt
- Programs of study matter
- Historically eligibility for student financial aid is based on institutional eligibility rather than particular program eligibility; "By evaluating individual programs instead, the federal government can help students and institutions target resources more effectively."

Sen. Alexander is asking for input from every corner of the higher education community – students and families, professors, institutions and others. Input is requested in writing and is due to the HELP Committee by 5 pm February 15. All comments will be shared with Ranking member of the Committee, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA). (see link below to provide comments)

Meanwhile, Sen. Murray said that Sen. Alexander's principles "would move us in the wrong direction and make it very clear we have some serious and tough issues to work through as we negotiate a comprehensive reauthorization of this important legislation, but I remain hopeful we can get this done as quickly as possible." She noted the law should put "students and taxpayers first — and that means strengthening our existing accountability provisions for schools that could be taking advantage of students, not

weakening or eliminating them. And we should be holding all colleges accountable for successful outcomes for all groups of students."

Highlights of Democratic principles released by Sen. Murray:

- Affordability – to tackle the burden of student loan debt
- Accountability – to ensure the provision of a quality education that leads to a real chance of getting a good job with a living wage
- Access – for working and middle class families and historically underrepresented groups such as students with disabilities
- Protecting the rights and safety of all students – including addressing sexual violence and the rights of all protected groups of students

The Democratic principles also note that improving teacher preparation programs is a priority in order to increase diversity of the workforce, reform programs and address teacher shortages.

Chairman Alexander said that the committee will be writing its reauthorization bill in the next few weeks. How bipartisan this process will turn out to be remains to be seen.

Sen Alexander: <https://www.help.senate.gov/chair/newsroom/press/alexander-seeks-input-on-higher-education-accountability-measures-to-ensure-students-receive-degrees-worth-their-time-and-moneya>

Sen. Murray: <https://www.help.senate.gov/ranking/newsroom/press/murray-higher-education-reauthorization-including-accountability-should-put-students-and-taxpayers>

3. New Resources for Educators

- The ASPEN Institute has a new report on social emotional learning <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/learning-happens-supporting-students-social-emotional-academic-development/>
- The National Council on Disability says colleges are not protecting students with disabilities from sexual assault: <https://ncd.gov/publications/2018/not-radar-sexual-assault-college-students-disabilities>
- The Education Commission of the states has released three new analyses.
 - The first is on suspension and expulsion: <https://www.ecs.org/suspension-and-expulsion/>

- The second is on restraint and seclusion: <https://www.ecs.org/restraint-and-seclusion/>
- The third is on alternative school discipline practices: <https://www.ecs.org/alternative-school-discipline-strategies/>

- Bellwether Education Partners has released an examination of how states are tracking teacher supply and demand information, in particular in relation to shortages: <https://bellwethereducation.org/publication/teacher-supply-and-demand-how-states-track-shortage-areas>

Washington Update will return February 16. Wishing you an early Happy Valentine's Day! Hug the ones you love, and maybe even those you don't!

Best,

Jane