

## Washington Update September 27, 2019

### Dear Colleagues –

It's been a breath-taking week in Washington as minute-to-minute developments unfold in the House's decision to pursue impeachment of President Trump. Yet, both bodies continue to move on their legislative agendas. The question becomes, how much oxygen will impeachment suck up and will there be any space left for anything else? And remember the Congress leaves town today for a two-week recess, to return with less than 30 legislative days scheduled before the end of the year! Of course, this could change.

#### 1. Senate Passes Continuing Resolution and Hits the Road

Barely meeting the deadline of September 30, the Senate adopted the House passed Continuing Resolution and sent it to President Trump for signature. Sixteen Senate Republicans opposed the bill. If the President signs it, which he is expected to do, the government will remain open and the current level of funding will continue through November 21. In other words, the showdown has been postponed for about two months.

Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL), Chair of the Appropriations Committee, is scheduled to meet with President Trump today to press his case that individual funding bills should be adopted, rather than utilizing a continuing resolution until September 30, 2020, just before the election, or facing a possible government shutdown.

You will recall that the House adopted all 12 of its individual funding bills for FY 2020 earlier this year – with a \$5 Billion increase for education. The Senate has not yet acted on its version of the education spending bill – the Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations bill – which would cut education funding by over \$700 million.

The Senate leaves town after a whirlwind of Committee adoption of 10 of the 12 funding bills for FY 2020, lining them up for votes on the floor. All but one of the 10 bills was endorsed unanimously by both Republicans and Democrats on the Appropriations Committee. The one partisan matter was the \$5 billion for the President's border wall in the Homeland Security funding bill. The vote for this bill was 17-14, with Democrats opposing.

The Congress will reconvene on October 15 and the saga will continue.

By the way, in the next two weeks your Representatives and Senators will be at home. This is a great time for you to meet with them and make your voice heard! Check with their district office near your home to see if there are town halls scheduled or other opportunities to meet with them. You can always invite them to visit with you and let them see the work you are doing as educators! Remember it's an election year, so most of them are particularly eager to engage with constituents.

See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2019/09/26/senate-passes-stopgap-spending-bill-keeping-government-open-through-nov-sending-measure-trump/>

## 2. Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act: On the Move?

Last week Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chair of the Senate HELP Committee, hinted that he might be moving a higher education bill. This week he made good on that promise and introduced the Student Aid Improvement Act. In introducing the bill, Alexander noted that he had working for five years with ranking member of the HELP Committee, Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), to develop a bipartisan reauthorization bill. He noted that they have not reached agreement on some issues, but that there are several bipartisan proposals on a number of issues intended to make college more affordable. While he said he intends to continue to work with Sen. Murray to develop a larger more comprehensive bill, he also wanted to move ahead with his bill.

This bill does not address Title II of the Higher Education Act, the part of the law related to the preparation of educators. Neither does it directly change critical student aid programs for future educators – the TEACH grants and teacher loan forgiveness programs.

The bill was prompted by the House's passage last week of the FUTURE Act, which extends funding for minority serving institutions. This funding is due to expire September 30. Sen. Alexander makes the case that the extension of this funding should be included in a broader package. His bill includes the following bipartisan measures:

- Makes permanent the \$255 million of mandatory funding for minority serving institutions
- Simplifies the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), reducing questions from 108 to 17-30
- Allows incarcerated people who are eligible for parole to use Pell grants
- Allows students to use Pell grants at high-quality short-term skills and job training programs for high demand fields
- Ensures students can understand their financial aid offers
- Increases the minimum Pell grant award
- Requires students who opt to pay back their loans under the income driven repayment plan to pay the full 10% of their discretionary income
- Allows students to answer up to 22 questions on the FAFSA with one click by using data from the IRS

While critics said Alexander's bill holds funding for minority serving institutions hostage and does not address some of the key matters related to college access, White House adviser Ivanka Trump applauded Sen. Alexander's approach in the bill.

Advocates continue to keep an eye on the House, where a rewrite of the Higher Education has been under consideration all year. This effort appears to be partisan, as it was in the last Congress. Recall that last year, Republican Committee Chair Virginia

Foxx (R-NC), moved the PROSPER Act to reauthorize the law. Democrats opposed this bill and introduced their own reauthorization bill, the Aim Higher Act. So stay tuned!

See: <https://www.alexander.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2019/9/alexander-introduces-long-term-solution-to-fund-historically-black-colleges-and-universities-and-other-minority-serving-institutions>

### 3. Two Opportunities for YOU!

- **Apply for an Internship in the Senate: Deadline November 1**

Ranking Member Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) on the Senate HELP Committee is seeking unpaid interns and law clerks for spring 2020. The positions – open to undergraduate, graduate and law students – offer an opportunity to participate in the legislative process while working with senior policy advisors. I began my career in policy with an internship such as this and I highly recommend this opportunity. Openings are available in the areas of:

- health policy
- education policy
- labor policy
- pensions policy
- disability policy

Apply here: <https://www.help.senate.gov/ranking/internships>

- **Tell the Office of Civil Rights Data Collection What You Think: Deadline Nov. 18**

The Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education is proposing to change the data which is routinely collected. A number of suggestions are made, including ending data collection on the following matters of concern to teachers:

- the full-time equivalency (FTE) count of teachers in their first year of teaching,
- FTE count of teachers in their second year of teaching, and
- FTE count of teachers absent more than 10 school days.

The following data elements are recommended for continuation:

- FTE counts of certified and non-certified teachers;
- FTE counts of school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses; and
- counts of teachers during the current school year, and the current and previous school year.

The Department proposes adding data regarding harassment or bullying of students based on “perceived religion” disaggregated by religious group and data about incidents of rape or sexual assault. The Education Department noted that the proposed changes are partly a response to President Trump’s executive order calling for federal agencies to minimize regulatory burdens.

The following questions are asked in the notice:

1. How are the data for each data element noted above being used by the public?
2. Are there other staff data elements that OCR could discontinue?

Multiple additional recommendations are made. You can submit your recommendations from the link below.

See: <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=ED-2019-ICCD-0119-0002>

#### 4. New Resources for Educators

- **The College Board** reports that while the number of students who took the SAT increased by 4% last year, the average score decreased by 9 points.

See: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sat-scores-fall-as-more-students-take-the-test-11569297660>

- **The Annie E. Casey Foundation** issued a report finding that African American and American Indian children are seven times more likely to live in poor neighborhoods than white children, and Latino children are nearly five times more likely. See: <https://aecf.app.box.com/s/cr0xdr98bt505c5qwt9215s3fm2lmhw>

- **Department of Education** has issued guidance for school districts on school safety.

See: <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/trump-administration-releases-school-safety-district-guide>

Wishing you a great beginning to Fall – always a time to begin anew and turn the page.

See you on twitter @janewestdc

Best,

Jane