

Washington Update January 4, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

Happy 116th Congress!! It's a new day in Washington DC with the House now controlled by Democrats, which means new Committee chairs, a new agenda and a new set of leaders. Are your seatbelts fastened?

1. The 116th Congress is Sworn in and Ready for Action

This week the new Congress was seated. The biggest shifts occurred in the House where a remarkable number of new and younger representatives are taking their place, including many people of color. An historic 102 members of the House are women and 25 members of the Senate. At age 29, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) is the youngest member ever to be seated in the House. Nancy Pelosi was voted in as Speaker of the House, returning to her role as the most powerful woman in the nation and the only woman to ever hold the post of Speaker of the House.

In her acceptance speech Pelosi called for support for public education. She outlined the goal of “building an economy for all American, giving them the tools they need to succeed in the 21st Century: Public education, workforce development, good-paying jobs and secure pensions.” She also called for universal background checks to purchase guns, legislation to end discrimination against the LGBT community and support for Dreamers. AFT President Randi Weingarten was among Pelosi’s guests at her swearing in in the House chamber.

New Committees are being organized and already one key House committee has changed its name. The Education and the Workforce Committee has returned to its previous name -- the Committee on Education and Labor. Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) will chair that committee and oversee a robust agenda of ESSA oversight and Higher Education hearings and eventually reauthorization, hopefully.

Among those newly sworn in as members of the House are a number of representatives with professional education experience, including:

- **Jahana Hayes (D-CT)**, former National Teacher of the Year
- **Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY)**, former education director at the National Hispanic Institute
- **Ilhan Omar (D-MN)**, formerly of the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota state Education Department
- **Donna Shalala (D-FL)**, former President of the University of Miami

In the Senate new members of the HELP Committee have been announced including newly elected Senators Mitt Romney (R-UT), Mike Braun (R-IN) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV).

<https://edlabor.house.gov/>

2. Government Shutdown Standoff Continues

One of the first acts of newly elected Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) was to pass a bill to end the 14 day government shutdown which is affecting 800,000 federal workers. (Note that the shutdown is partial and does not apply to the Department of Education). Joined by 7 Republicans, House Democrats passed a bill to immediately reopen all agencies until the end of the year with the exception of Homeland Security – which would be resolved by February 8. The Homeland Security funding bill is at the heart of contention related to President Trump’s demand for \$5 billion to build a border security wall with Mexico. Speaker Pelosi has adamantly refused to include such funding in an appropriations bill.

The action now shifts to the Senate, where Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has said he will not bring up any bill which President Trump will not sign. And the President has indicated that he will not sign the House-passed bill. Behind the scenes negotiations continue as Senate Republicans become increasingly uneasy with the standoff. Sen. Cory Gardner (R-CO) is the first Republican to call for an end to the shut down and Susan Collins (R-ME) said she would support separating the Homeland Security bill from the others which would result in reopening most of the shuttered federal agencies – just as the House bill proposes.

It will be hard for the Congress to really get moving on other business as long as the shutdown standoff sits in the middle of the agenda. Pressure will build and perhaps the President will look for a way to save face while compromising. We shall see.

3. New Resources for Educators

- *Ed Week* has published a quick guide to some key data about public education in the U.S. including:
 - There are 132,853 schools in the U.S.
 - 91, 422 are traditional public schools
 - 6855 are public charter schools

- 34, 576 are private schools
- There are 13, 584 school districts
- There are 50.7 million students in public schools of whom 48.9% are white
- There are 3.2 million full time equivalent teachers, 76.6% of whom are female and 80.15% of whom are white

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/education-statistics/index.html>

- *The Rand Corporation* is out with a study which found that in Pittsburgh public schools restorative practices, such as inclusive and non-punitive approaches to conflict resolution were successful in reducing student suspensions.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html
- *The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights* has set up a new website (Students Deserve Better) calling for Education Sec. Betsy DeVos to be sent to the principal's office for all she has done to **harm** students. <https://studentsdeservebetter.org/>

4. Opportunity on The Horizon

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) will be announcing a new initiative in February – a Networked Improvement Community focused on higher education programs which are addressing critical teacher shortages in special education. AACTE will be putting forward an application for interested programs. They will be choosing 10 programs with a range of strategies in progress to address the special education teacher shortage. This project is supported by CEEDAR (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform) which is hosted by the University of Florida and led by our own Mary Brownell. Stay tuned for additional information in early February.

Wishing you all the best for 2019! See you on twitter @janewestdc

Best,

Jane