

## Washington Update January 31, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Happy Friday. What a week! What are you looking forward to more: The Super Bowl or the Iowa Caucuses? I'll let you guess which one it is for me!

### 1. Federal Budget: The Deficit Explodes; Do Earmarks Return?

The federal government's budget deficit is projected to reach \$1.02 trillion in 2020 – the first time since 2012 that the deficit breached the \$1 trillion threshold – according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The combination of 2017 tax cuts and new spending have been the biggest contributors to the increased deficit. FY 2020 is likely to see spending in the \$4.6 trillion range while the government brings in only \$3.6 trillion in tax revenue. CBO Director Phillip Swagel said "changes in fiscal policy must be made to address the budget situation, because our debt is growing on an unsustainable path."

Meanwhile, up on Capitol Hill, there is some serious consideration underway about bringing back earmarks. Euphemistically called “congressionally directed spending” and cynically called “pork”, earmarks enable members of Congress to target funds directly to projects in their districts within must-pass appropriations bills. This was a time-honored tradition on Capitol Hill for many years. Many observers thought these were essential negotiating chits which enabled controversial bills, such as the Labor/HHS/Education spending bill, to gain bipartisan passage. Over time perspectives on earmarks soured and they came to be considered taboo; they were banned years ago.

House Appropriations Chair, Rep. Nina Lowey (D-NY) is talking with Democratic colleagues to gauge their interest and seek input. The plan under deliberation would be a revised version of past earmarking with rules in place to keep the system in check. One aide to a freshman Democrat who flipped a GOP-held seat in 2018 noted "This is not what we came to Congress to do. Voters made it clear years ago that they were tired of pork and special interest spending in Washington and sweetheart deals." However, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer backs the revival of an earmark-type system. However, the Senate does not seem receptive to the idea. "The Republican Caucus is on the record against that, so that's not going to go anywhere," said Senate Appropriations Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL).

See: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/28/us-budget-deficit-to-break-1-trillion-in-fiscal-2020-cbo-says.html>

See: <https://www.rollcall.com/news/congress/lowey-discuss-earmarks-freshman-risk-democrats>

## 2. The Reading Wars Continue

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) issued a report this week on how teachers are prepared to teach reading. Its scorecard determined that there was an increase from 35% to 51% of teacher preparation programs which received a grade of A or B in the preparation of teachers to teach reading. One thousand programs were examined. One notable finding was:

“The type of teacher preparation program matters. Undergraduate programs are nearly twice as likely to teach scientifically- based instructional methods as graduate programs, and four times more likely as non-traditional “alternative certification” programs.”

Sec. DeVos responded to the report:

“When nearly half of our nation's teaching colleges are teaching future teacher what amounts to junk science, it's no wonder nearly half of our nation's low-income 8th graders are functionally illiterate," she said in a statement. "How can anyone sit by and let this continue? How can even one college continue with a discredited curriculum? We know how to teach kids how to read. We just need to equip teachers with the fact-based, proven science to do it."

NCTQ’s methodology, which is predominately a review of syllabi, has come under fire with the analogy being made that it is like evaluating a restaurant based on reading the menu.

[https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ\\_2020\\_Teacher\\_Prep\\_Review\\_Program\\_Performance\\_in\\_Early\\_Reading\\_Instruction](https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ_2020_Teacher_Prep_Review_Program_Performance_in_Early_Reading_Instruction)

## 3. Federal Proportion of IDEA Funds Decreases Despite Actual Increases

Despite an increase of \$400 million for Part B of IDEA in FY 2020, the actual federal share of spending decreased from 14.3% in FY 2019 to 13% in FY 2020. This occurs when the number of students needing services increases and/or the intensity of services needed increases. IDEA commits the federal government to paying for up to 40% of the excess cost (above what it costs to educate general education students) of educating students with disabilities. When the federal share of costs declines, state and local funds must make up the difference. For FY 2020, Congress would have had to triple the \$12.8 billion it currently provides (reaching \$38.4 billion) in order to secure full funding for IDEA.

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R44624.pdf>

#### 4. New Resources for Educators

- **Ed Week** offers a summary of education platforms of the Democratic candidates running for President in 2020: <https://www.edweek.org/ew/projects/education2020/index.html>
- **Crip the Vote** offers a review of disability platforms of the Democratic candidates running for President in 2020: <http://cripthevote.blogspot.com/p/2020-presidential-candidates.html>
- **iCivics** offers a resource for teaching about impeachment: <https://www.icivics.org/teachers/lesson-plans/impeachment-and-conviction-infographic>
- **Educational Researcher** has published a new article which finds that high school GPAs are five times stronger than ACT scores in predicting college graduation: <https://www.era.net/Newsroom/High-School-GPAs-and-ACT-Scores-as-Predictors-of-College-Completion-Examining-Assumptions-about-Consistency-across-High-Schools>
- **The Bipartisan Policy Center** is out with *A New Course for Higher Education*, a blueprint for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The recommendations were developed over the past 18 months and led by former chairs of the House Committee on Education and Labor, Rep. George Miller (D-CA) and Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA). Some key recommendations include increasing mandatory spending on Pell Grants by \$9 billion per year and restructuring the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program into a \$300-a-month benefit for up to five years: [https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/WEB\\_BPC\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Report\\_RV8.pdf](https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/WEB_BPC_Higher_Education_Report_RV8.pdf)
- **National Center for Homeless Education** released data showing that schools identified 1.5 million students who experienced homelessness in the 2017-18 school year, an 11 percent jump from the previous year: <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Federal-Data-Summary-SY-15.16-to-17.18-Published-1.30.2020.pdf>

I'm off to Portland, OR next week for the annual CEC conference. Hope to see you there, and if not, on twitter @janewestdc

Best,  
Jane

