

Washington Update November 19, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Democrats in Congress are taking a victory lap as they leave town today for a weeklong Thanksgiving recess next week. With House passage of the Build Back Better Act, the Biden agenda is one step closer to enactment. But the Senate will have the final say.

1. House Passes Build Back Better Bill – At Last!

After weeks of fraught negotiations, and multiple postponed votes, the House finally passed the Build Back Better Act (the reconciliation bill) this morning. One Democrat (Rep. Jared Golden of Maine) sided with all Republicans opposing the bill. This left the Democrats with the slim margin they needed to cross the finish line.

House Democrats were waiting for the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) to release its [full cost estimate](#) on the reconciliation bill before scheduling the vote. With the CBO release on Thursday, they were poised to vote right away; however, those plans were [derailed](#) by an eight hour and 32 minute [floor speech](#) from the chamber's top Republican Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). Democrats did not expect the lengthy floor speech from McCarthy — touching on everything from his desire to own a Tesla, Abraham Lincoln's assassination, and the Los Angeles police department. "Kevin McCarthy has now shown more anger about making child care affordable than he has about the insurrection on January 6th," Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-N.Y.) tweeted. Meanwhile, Speaker Pelosi's office emailed a press release with the subject line, "Is Kevin McCarthy OK?"

In a floor speech just before the vote, Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) said: "With the passage of the Build Back Better Act, we, this Democratic Congress, are taking our place in the long and honorable heritage of our democracy with legislation that will be the pillar of health and financial security in America. It will be historic in forging landmark progress for our nation." House Majority leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) said the bill was "one of the most consequential bills that any member will ever vote on."

The CBO reports the package will cost \$1.7 trillion over a decade and add \$367 billion to the deficit. But that number does not include possible revenue brought in by increased IRS enforcement, meaning the impact on the federal budget gap would be less. When accounting for the possible extra tax revenue, projections suggest the package would add \$160 billion over 10 years to the federal deficit rather than \$367 billion. The White House, however, insists that the IRS enforcement will yield even more revenue, ensuring the bill is actually fully paid for.

The \$1.7 billion bill includes massive investments in education, from childcare, to preschool, to college affordability, to the educator pipeline. The Senate is expected to take up the bill in the coming weeks and changes are all but assured as they seek to hold

all Democrats together for the 50 votes they must have to pass the bill. Resistance from moderate Senate Democrats and procedural hurdles (including the parliamentarian's determination about appropriateness of provisions in a reconciliation bill) represent significant roadblocks which could drag out Senate consideration for some time. With only three legislative weeks left in the year and a crowded agenda, the pressure is on.

2. House Ed and Labor Committee Holds Hearing on Covid Relief Dollars to Schools

On Wednesday, Deputy Education Secretary Cindy Marten and Education Undersecretary James Kvaal testified before the House Education and Labor's pre-K-12 and higher education panels on the implementation of Covid-19 education funds. "We owe it to our students to create educational experiences that are safe, healthy, inspiring and that they can connect to," Marten said in her opening remarks. "We have more work to do but the progress made is evidenced in the joy and experiences of teachers and students around the country sitting in their classrooms right now."

Marten and Kvaal were grilled by lawmakers for nearly 3.5 hours on learning loss, resources for underserved students, mask mandate requirements and other issues that have affected classrooms since the onset of the pandemic. In addition, lawmakers pressed both Marten and Kvaal for more clarity surrounding the percentage of Covid relief funds that have been spent by districts and on oversight of states' use of such relief dollars.

While much of the questioning focused on p-12, Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) put the spotlight on higher education online learning programs, asking Kvaal how the department will monitor education tech providers and online program managers that help schools manage their digital curriculum. "This is a real interest of ours," Kvaal said of online program managers. "We're working very hard to highlight the good practices in the areas of online and trying to make the most out of it. And where online is not serving students well, we're going to be very aggressive."

You can listen to the hearing and read testimony and Member statements [here](#).

3. President Biden Nominates Glenna Gallo to Serve as Assistant Secretary for Special Education

Late last week, President Biden nominated assistant superintendent of special education for the Washington state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Glenna Gallo, to serve as assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services at the U.S. Department of Education.

In a [statement](#), Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona praised the nomination:

"I am thrilled that President Biden has nominated Glenna Gallo to serve as assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services at the U.S. Department of Education. This nomination shows a deep commitment from this administration to ensure our nation's students with disabilities receive the services and supports they

need to reach their potential. Glenna brings decades of deep expertise in special education and a strong record of supporting students with disabilities to this role. During her work in Washington State as the assistant superintendent of special education, Glenna oversaw millions of dollars for state special education programs and worked to ensure these programs adequately supported and uplifted students with disabilities. Glenna's commitment to supporting the special education community will be instrumental in shaping and implementing the Department's goals and strategies. I am thankful for her willingness to serve our nation."

Prior to her work as assistant superintendent of special education, Gallo spent seven years as the state director of special education for the Utah State Board of Education. Beginning her career as a classroom teacher, Gallo has over 25 years of public education experience.

4. Advocacy Action Alert

This week, 33 Members of Congress reintroduced the IDEA Full Funding Act of 2021. This bill would require yearly increases to funding for programs that support students with disabilities, their families, and their educators. In 1975, Congress promised to fund 40% of the additional cost of special education services when it passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, that promise has never been met. Due to this, state and local governments have shouldered the additional costs of special education services. It's time to have Congress fulfill the pledge to support students with disabilities. ***Thanks to our colleagues at the National Center for Learning Disabilities, you can use this [form](#) to tell your Members of Congress to support the IDEA Full Funding Act and ensure that schools have sufficient funding for special education.***

5. New Resources

- [The Center for Learner Equity](#) released an analysis on the experience of students with disabilities in charter and traditional public schools.
- [The National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) is out with a new report looking at perspectives of higher education leaders and the future of the early childhood education workforce.

Washington Update will be on pause for Thanksgiving next week. We will return December 3. Wishing you all a joyful Thanksgiving filled with gratitude, family and friends, and great food!

Best,

Jane and Kait
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