

Washington Update October 15, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Congress has been working hard this week, even though they are out of session. Negotiations on the reconciliation bill continue intensely behind the scenes, and next week promises to be action packed when they return.

1. Default Averted: President Biden Signs into Law Short-Term Measure to Raise the Debt Ceiling

On Thursday, President Biden [signed](#) into a law a bill to raise the debt ceiling, averting a default on the nation's financial obligations through at least December 3rd. The House interrupted their scheduled recess and voted on the Senate passed measure earlier in the day. As you recall, last week the Senate passed the short-term debt ceiling extension with a party line 50-48 vote--though 11 Republicans ultimately joined with Democrats to get the required 60 votes to overcome the legislative filibuster.

The debt extension raises the nation's borrowing limit by \$480 billion and preserves the United States' credit through December 3rd, the same time that government funding is set to expire. With both parties drawing new lines in the sand, it remains unclear how that impasse will be resolved. Republicans say Democrats can and will need to use the budget reconciliation process to enact further debt increases. Democrats for their part say they will not and want a bipartisan process.

“Congress took a welcome step forward over the last week in putting a disastrous debt standoff behind us, and Republicans demonstrated with their votes last Thursday that there's no reason why they can't do the exact same thing in December by joining with Democrats to raise the debt limit instead of triggering another showdown that would jeopardize millions of jobs, pay for the military, and benefits for seniors,” White House spokesperson Mike Gwin said in a written [statement](#). “Fundamentally,” Gwin concluded, “we cannot allow partisan politics to hold our economy hostage, and we can't allow the routine process of paying our bills to turn into a political football that puts our country at risk every two years, or every two months.”

Will Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) force Democrats to use reconciliation in December? Will a messy standoff complicate Democrats' efforts in the mid-term elections? Stay tuned for continued Congressional cliff hangers through the end of the year.

2. Applications Are Open for the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation Public Policy Fellowship in Washington, DC

Applications are now open for the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation Public Policy Fellowship. This is a one-year, full-time, intensive immersion experience in Washington,

D.C. It is designed for “professionals, and/or persons experiencing disability and/or family members of persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities who are currently working or volunteering in the field of inclusive services and supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.” The purpose of the Fellowship is to prepare emerging leaders to assume leadership roles in the public policy arena at the state and/or national levels. During this one-year Fellowship, the successful applicant will learn how federal legislation is initiated, developed, and passed by the Congress, as well as how programs are administered and regulations promulgated by federal agencies. Fellows also learn how the organized disability community works to shape public policy impacting people with disabilities, and their families. The deadline to apply is November 15th at 5:00PM EST. More information and directions to apply can be found [here](#).

3. New Resources for Educators

- [The Office for Civil Rights](#) released a fact sheet, issued jointly with the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division, Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Students at Risk of Self-Harm in the Era of COVID-19. The new fact sheet contains information about the protections the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act offer to students with mental health disabilities, and provides scenarios to illustrate when OCR or DOJ may consider opening an investigation.
- [The Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\)](#) released the [2020 NAEP “Nation’s Report Card”](#) that reported a drop in math and reading scores for 13 year olds compared with 2012 – the first time there had been a drop in about 50 years. The 2020 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Long-Term Trend Reading and Mathematics Results at Ages 9 and 13 were concluded before the pandemic began, and scores for the lowest-performing students declined from 2012 to 2020, Some research shows that the cut in education spending following the Great Recession – when these students were just starting school – could be part of the cause.
- [National Education Policy Center](#) released a report focusing on the subversion of IDEA and federal policies designed to reduce racial disparities in special education.

Wishing you a lovely fall weekend,

Jane and Kait

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