

Washington Update October 25, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

While I am not much of a sports fan, having our home team -- the Nationals -- compete in the World Series is a thrill – a thrill that DC needs now more than ever. My son and my step-son have secured tickets and I'll be joining them at game 5 (if there is one) on Sunday! Go NATS!

1. Funding Bills Move in the Senate, but Not for Education

November 21, less than a month away, is the date the government runs out of money. The ball is in the Senate court, as they have yet to pass any appropriations bills on the floor. Majority Leader McConnell (R-KY) has teed up passage of the first package of funding bills, which Democrats have said they will support. But that package does not include education spending, which is in the Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill.

The second package that McConnell has proposed would include the Labor/HHS/Education bill, but that one will not have bipartisan support. There are multiple sticking points. First, the budget agreement that was passed by the House and the Senate adds \$49 billion in spending authority over last year. However, how that amount is divvied up between the 12 separate funding bills has not been agreed to between the House and Senate. The House has a much higher number for the Labor/HHS/Education spending bill than the Senate does, allowing for multiple increases for education programs. At this point the House is pushing the Senate to revise those numbers before passing their funding bills, but the Senate is not responding. The Senate has allocated a large -- and many would argue disproportionate -- amount of the increase for Defense and Homeland security, with a nod to President Trump's desire for funding to build a border wall.

Because resolution of these complexities is highly unlikely within the three weeks left before the deadline, the likelihood of a continuing resolution (which keeps funding at current levels) is great. Some believe it will be only for a few weeks – into December – forcing continued action before the end of the year. Others believe a year long continuing resolution, taking us through September 2020 is likely.

Of course, the specter of impeachment proceedings is of tremendous significance, as that would sideline any and all other Congressional business. As Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL), chair of the Appropriations Committee noted “I think looming over all of it is what the House might do on impeachment, and if they do, and when they do it. When it comes over here, it becomes the order of the day.”

2. House Committee to Mark Up Higher Education Act Reauthorization Bill Next Week

The House Committee on Education and Labor has scheduled a mark up for H.R. 4674, the College Affordability Act, on Tuesday, October 29. The markup is likely to run two to three days. The 1200 page bill was introduced last week by Committee Chair Bobby Scott (D-VA) and represents the first comprehensive reauthorization proposal for the Higher Education Act (HEA) in this Congress. HEA has not been reauthorized since 2008.

The bill, dramatically different from last year's Republican proposal to reauthorize HEA -- the PROSPER Act-- is unlikely to garner any Republican support -- just as the PROSPER Act did not receive any Democratic support. Thus, the markup is likely to be contentious, complex and long.

The education policy community has been pouring over the bill all week, comparing it to current law, to other higher education proposals and conferring with committee staff to clarify intentions and legislative language. It is a complex task! Furthermore, Chair Scott plans to offer a substitute bill at the markup on Tuesday which will include multiple changes based on the feedback the office has received over the last week -- from both Members of the House and education and related interest groups.

At this point, the bill is receiving mixed reviews. While there is considerable support for increases in funding for student financial aid and institutional support and authorization levels for a number of programs, there is concern about the complexity and increased administrative burden that the bill would place on colleges and universities. There are a number of provisions in the bill that promote community colleges and AA degrees as well as extending some student financial aid to short-term job training programs. The federal role in accreditation of institutions of higher education would be more pronounced with a requirement for outcomes-based assessment of institutions.

In terms of teacher education, the bill retains -- and in many ways -- strengthens the Teacher Quality Partnership grant program in Title II, the federal government's signature investment in comprehensive strengthening of teacher preparation. Increasing the authorization level to \$500 million is a welcome provision considering that the program is currently funded at \$43 million. However, as you know, it is the appropriators that determine the amount of funding the program actually receives, not the authorizers.

The TEACH grants are modified in two significant ways: only juniors and seniors at four-year institutions would be eligible (currently students in all four years are eligible) and students pursuing terminal AA degrees for early childhood would become eligible. In addition, there are multiple new data collection requirements for participating institutions, on top of new data collection required across the board for all of higher education. The significant increase of data collection would require new resources to be invested in the effort from higher education and would likely serve as a disincentive for institutions to participate in the TEACH grant program.

It will be interesting to see what changes Chairman Scott has made to the bill when he brings it to the Committee for markup on Tuesday. The intention is to move the bill onto the House floor for a vote before the end of the year, but whether or not that will occur is unclear. The bill is very unlikely to receive any airtime in the Senate, as the Senate is controlled by Republicans. However, the House Democratic bill is important as it will stand as the Democratic marker moving forward.

See: <https://edlabor.house.gov/the-college-affordability-act-facts>

3. Education Commission on the States: New Analysis on Teacher Shortage and State Policy

The Education Commission on the States (ECS) has issued a very interesting report: *50-State Comparison: Teacher Recruitment and Retention*. In the words of the report:

“This resource compiles state-specific data related to teacher shortages and provides a national comparison of state policies to recruit and retain teachers, especially in shortage subject areas and underserved schools. The resource features state educator preparation program completion data, shortage and equity gap data, in addition to policies found in state statutes, regulations and other documents, as of August 2019.”

Some key findings from the report include (quoted from the report):

- Forty-five states reported a decrease in educator preparation program completion between 2008-09 and 2016-17.
- Thirteen states reported an increase in educator preparation program completion between 2015-16 and 2016-17. Oregon reported the greatest percentage increase in completion (+11%).
- Most states rely heavily — and sometimes exclusively — on traditional teacher preparation programs to train teacher candidates. However, in 2017, three states and the District of Columbia reported that more than 50% of their educator preparation program graduates came from alternative preparation programs.
- States are creating pathways, programs and/or incentives to recruit high school students and paraprofessionals into the teaching profession. Twenty-two states have policies in place to recruit high school students, and 23 states have policies in place to recruit paraprofessionals.
- Forty-four states define at least one statewide scholarship/grant, loan forgiveness and/or additional pay program in statute to recruit teachers to underserved schools

and/or shortage subject areas. Eleven states define at least one statewide financial incentive program for teachers of color.

- Thirty-one states require induction and mentoring support for new teachers, and 22 states require or explicitly encourage reduced teaching loads for new and/or mentor teachers. Eleven states require that an established portion of a teacher's work day/week be designated for teacher planning.

See: <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-teacher-recruitment-and-retention/>

Wishing you a colorful Fall weekend. And, once again, GO NATS!
See you on twitter @janewestdc

Best,
Jane