

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

# Legislative Letters

July 22, 2019

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## Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "The Capitol"

A spending caps deal has been reached (though not released), and the House is planning on voting on it this week before the August recess, a recess that puts Congress (especially the Senate) in a tight crunch to finish all 12 spending bills by October 1st. Education legislators are introducing bills to tackle food insecurity on college campuses, expanding federal aid to cover certification programs, and improving mental health resources for college students, the latter of which we have contacted the sponsors in the [House](#) and the [Senate](#) advocating for graduate-professional specific needs. The House has passed the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act, which would increase wait times for recently-graduated international students applying for green cards, and we've contacted all senators [requesting an amendment](#) that would prioritize applicants who have earned their degrees in the U.S. International students are also facing increased wait times for visas and applications for optional practical training, delays that the House Judiciary examined in a hearing. And it's time for the fall LAD! [Register for this fall's Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days here!](#)

# THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Speedily Resolving Civil Rights Cases

The Department of Education (ED) has announced that it has [resolved civil rights claims twice as fast](#) as under President Obama's administration by focusing on the merits of each claim instead of investigating systemic issues, a method used under the Obama administration. However, this method has been criticized as being too quick to dismiss cases without investigating them.

### Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education

Robert King has been [confirmed by the Senate](#) to his new position at the ED, assistant secretary for postsecondary education. He's been serving as a senior advisor to the department for the past year and has previously served in higher education in Kentucky and New York.

### Education Advisory Panel

The Trump administration has ordered a reduction in the number of advisory panels for its federal agencies in order to cut waste. As the ED has begun to review its committees, it was revealed that its commissions on educational excellence for Hispanics and African Americans have been essentially inactive.

### Betsy DeVos's Emails

Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is under fire for the [use of her personal email in official business](#) (and for failing to forward the emails to her official account within 20 days), a violation of the Federal Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The watchdog organization, American Oversight, is [suing the ED to release Secretary DeVos's official emails](#) that she sent using her personal email account.

## IMMIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CONCERNS

The Trump administration's immigration policies have been affecting international students in a variety of ways. In particular, students are facing longer wait times for visas as well as for practical training programs and green cards, fewer applications being approved ([new data on H-1B visas](#)), and increased scrutiny. As a result, fewer international students are seeking to earn a U.S. degree, putting academic programs and various STEM industries in jeopardy. Several higher education organizations and institutions have spoken out against these policies, the most recent being the President of Harvard University, Lawrence S. Bacow. Bacow released a statement to the Secretary of State and acting Homeland Security Secretary expressing his concern over these policies.

# THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

## LEGISLATION

### Spending Caps

Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury Secretary, has announced that an [agreement has been reached](#) between the White House and Congressional leaders regarding the budget caps. The official deal hasn't been released yet, but we're expecting to see lower non-defense discretionary than what the House approved earlier this year, increasing spending to [\\$300 billion over 2020 and 2021](#). Senate Republicans have expressed [concern that President Trump won't sign the deal](#) and will renege on any agreement to, like he did with the appropriations bills last winter that led to the government shutdown.

### Appropriations

Once the new caps are signed into law - the House is planning on voting on it during its Thursday session - the House will need to revise its previous allocations, and the Senate will need to begin theirs, before the October 1 deadline, a tight schedule with the August recess starting next week. The newest updates from the Senate indicates they aren't expected to begin working on their bills until they return in September. [Please contact your Senators and ask they support education funding at the levels passed by the House \(#SaveStudentAid\).](#)

### Education Legislation

Student loan debt continues to drive much of the education-related legislation. Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) has [proposed two pieces of legislation](#). One would expand federal aid for vocational and certification programs, and the other would require institutions to be responsible for half of the student loan debt of students who default. Another bill, the JOBS Act, would also [expand Pell eligibility to certificate programs](#).

Two bills have been introduced to address food insecurity on college campuses following a [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report](#) that millions of college students are not receiving federal food assistance but may be el

igible. The [Closing the College Hunger Gap Act](#), introduced by Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) and representatives Jahana Hayes (D-CT) and Marcia Fudge (D-OH), would require tracking food and housing insecurity on college campuses as well as provide students with resources. The [College Student Hunger Act of 2019](#), introduced by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Representative Al Lawson (D-FL), expands eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to cover more students and pushing governments and institutions to be more proactive about food insecurity.

The [College Transparency Act continues to gain support](#), with currently nearly 40 congressional representatives signing on as sponsors. The bill would lift the ban on tracking graduation rates, debt loads, and earnings for students who graduate from institutions. NAGPS also sent letters to the

sponsors of the [Higher Education Mental Health Act of 2019](#) in the [House](#) and the [Senate](#) requesting the bill incorporate the unique needs of graduate and professional students.

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has released a [legislative brief on the Expanding Access to Graduate Education Act](#) (HR 3334), that would allow graduate students to access remaining Pell funds for their graduate degrees.

Concerns over intellectual espionage has resulted in the passage of legislation in the House that would create a working group across the federal agencies that would evaluate the current status of oversight and develop a framework to address security needs. The [Securing American Science and Technology Act of 2019 \(HR 3038\)](#) was passed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2020.

## **International Student Concerns**

The Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act (HR. 1044) would remove per-country caps for employment-based green cards has passed the House of Representatives and moves to the Senate, along with its companion bill (S. 386). Fang Zhang, NAGPS Director of International Student Concerns, released a [statement on the legislation](#) earlier this year expressing concern that this legislation would not reduce wait times, but would likely increase them, especially for recently-graduated international students seeking to stay in the U.S. NAGPS sent letters to all U.S. senators and the Senate Committees on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and on the Judiciary requesting an amendment to the legislation that would [prioritize applicants who earned advanced degrees](#) in the United States.

## **HEARINGS**

Several [hearings were held by the House Science Committee](#) that follow an [April GAO report](#) on the implementation of scientific integrity policies at the federal agencies. The report indicated that many of the agencies had taken insufficient measures to ensure scientific integrity would be maintained. For example, during the hearing, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was accused of dismissing the health effects of certain chemicals in its regulations, and the Department of the Interior (DI) was accused of reassigning their director of the Office of Policy Analysis as a result of his work on the impacts of climate change. Also discussed in the hearing was the [Scientific Integrity Act \(HR 1709\)](#) introduced by Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY) earlier this year that would require agencies to formally establish and maintain scientific principles that would maintain research integrity.

The [visa delays at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services \(USCIS\)](#) was discussed by the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship. Many of the delays seem to be caused by policy changes within USCIS including the closing of field offices and increasing visa fees. Subcommittee Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) expressed concern over the impact of delays for the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program is affecting international students.

# THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

## LITIGATION

### Public Service Loan Forgiveness

The [American Federation of Teachers has filed a lawsuit against Secretary DeVos](#) for her mismanagement of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. The ED has only approved one percent of the over 75,000 applications since 2017.

## IN RELATED NEWS...

### RELEVANT READS

#### Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

[New law requires suicide prevention programs at higher ed institutions](#)

[Why are college kids going hungry?](#)

[How Rising College Costs and Student Debt Contribute to a Social-Mobility 'Crisis'](#)

[Study Finds Lack of Black Tenured Faculty at All Levels of Higher Education](#)

[Fighting generational trauma through education](#)

[How student debt hinders teacher diversity](#)

[Higher Ed 'Opportunity Gap' Continuing to Widen](#)

[Higher Ed Civil Rights Coalition Releases Equity Prescription](#)

[Mental Health First Aid for Higher Education](#)

[Many College Students Are Too Poor to Eat](#)

[More Latinx Students, Stagnant Latinx Presidents](#)

[Civil Rights Groups Seek End to Aid Restrictions for Students With Criminal Histories](#)

[Attacking Chinese on Our Campuses Only Hurts America](#)

[Removing the Barriers](#)

[Amid concerns about grad student mental health, one university takes a novel approach](#)

[When Saying No Is Not the Answer \(Race and Mentoring\)](#)

[At HBCUs founded for food research, students search for healthy meals](#)

#### Career Advice

[A Graduate Student's Complete Guide to Student Loans](#)

[Odds Are, Your Doctorate Will Not Prepare You for a Profession Outside Academe](#)

[How Do You Conference?](#)

[What Matters More: Skills or Degrees?](#)

[Cutting Across Disciplinary Boundaries](#)

[How to Start Writing for the Public](#)

[Smart Language Always Puts Your Audience First](#)

[Beating the Summer Writing Blues](#)

Cultivating Happiness by Building Resilience in the Academic Workplace: [Part One](#) & [Part Two](#)

[Portraits of mentoring excellence](#)

[Summer Is for Research, Reading -- and Self-Reflection](#)

### **The State of Higher Education**

[Doctoral education needs reform to compete internationally](#)

[Squeezed From All Sides: Opportunities and Challenges for Regional Public Universities](#)

[Study shows graduate teaching assistants make least money in Montana](#)

### **Higher Education Policy**

[Universities Under Pressure as Lawmakers Push Research Security](#)

[Statement on NSF's commitment to secure, open international research collaboration](#)

[How Higher Education Became a Pawn in the Partisan Forever War](#)

[Higher education policy a focus of Democratic presidential primary](#)

[Poll: Most Adults Say Higher Ed Cost Big Election Issue](#)

[Student Borrowing Up, Federal Data Show](#)

[Common Sense on Colleges and Work-Force Development](#)

[If You're \(Universities\) Not All Things to All People, What Are You?](#)

[Mental Health in Higher Education as a Financial Incentive](#)

[Bipartisan Panel Tackles Government's Role in Higher Education Accountability](#)

[States Put Stamp on Student Loan Oversight](#)

[Higher Ed Groups Ask Lawmakers to Prioritize Graduate Education](#)

[Buttigieg Proposes Limited Student Debt Cancellation](#)

[Climate Emergency Declarations: How Cities Are Leading The Charge](#)

## **REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS**

[The Effects on Employment and Family Income of Increasing the Federal Minimum Wage, CBO.](#) The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour for most workers. In this report, CBO examines how increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10, \$12, or \$15 per hour by 2025 would affect employment and family income.

[Monthly Budget Review for June 2019, CBO.](#) The federal budget deficit was \$746 billion for the first nine months of fiscal year 2019, the CBO estimates, \$139 billion more than the deficit recorded during the same period last year. Revenues were \$69 billion higher and outlays were \$208 billion higher than during the first nine months of 2018.

[The Distribution of Household Income, 2016, CBO.](#) In 2016, the average household income before accounting for means-tested transfers and federal taxes was \$21,000 for the lowest quintile and \$291,000 for the highest quintile. After transfers and taxes, those averages were \$35,000 and \$214,000.

[H.R. 36, Combating Sexual Harassment in Science Act of 2019, CBO.](#) As ordered reported by the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on June 20, 2019.

[CBO's Economic Forecast: Understanding the Slowdown of Productivity Growth, CBO.](#) Presentation by Robert Shackleton, an analyst in CBO's Macroeconomic Analysis Division, at the NABE Foundation's 16th Annual Economic Measurement Seminar.

[CBO's 10-Year Budget and Economic Projections, CBO.](#) Presentation by Jeffrey F. Werling, CBO's Assistant Director for Macroeconomic Analysis, at the NABE Foundation's 16th Annual Economic Measurement Seminar.

*Want to let us know how we can improve? [Give us feedback!](#)*