

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Legislative Letters

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Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "The Capitol"

Higher education policy news has not been slowing down, even with other new making headlines. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced new regulations regarding sexual misconduct will be released soon. President Trump released his proposed FY2021 budget, which makes a 7.8% to the Department of Education. Several bills have been introduced to Congress; the Senate bills recommend amendments to the HEA, and the House bills increase funding for postsecondary education. The CBO also released a report on income-driven student loans.

[Call for volunteers to International Student Concerns Committee \(ISCC\):](#)

NAGPS Director of International Student Concerns, Madhan Kumar Arulanandam (disc@nagps.org), is interested in beginning an International Student Concerns Committee. The Committee would primarily focus on issues concerning international graduate and professional students in the U.S.A. Interested graduate students—domestic or international—are encouraged to fill out this [form](#).

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In the coming weeks, Secretary Betsy DeVos will announce rules on [sexual misconduct for colleges and universities](#) that will help protect victims of stalking and dating violence. By announcing these rules, it will consider dating violence and stalking as forms of gender discrimination protected for in Title IX.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND OTHER AGENCIES

Presidential Budget

President Trump released his proposed [budget](#) for FY2021. Within higher education, the budget proposes \$749 million for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and \$150 million to support STEM at these schools. This is in addition to the \$85 million in mandatory funding to HBCUs in the FUTURE Act. The administration also proposes to “eliminat[e] default for impoverished borrowers and providing expedited loans forgiveness” to those who have been responsibly paying their loans for 15 years. The budget also suggests creating annual and lifetime loan limits and closes loopholes allowing high-earning graduate degree holders from avoiding repaying their student loans. The budget also recommends expanding Pell Grants to include non-traditional schools and for incarcerated students to be eligible. In addition, the budget empowers states to create and maintain post-secondary preparation programs, such as TRIO, GEAR UP, and CAMP.

The budget also calls for protecting free speech on campuses, redesign the accreditation process for postsecondary institutions, the Department of Education to use the borrower defense rule, emphasises the rescission of the Gainful Employment regulations. It also calls for improving the student loan interface. Finally, the budget reduces the number of programs from 11 programs and 29 elementary and secondary programs into a single block grant. This includes the elimination of the Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants and International Education programs, combining them into the block grant. According to the budget “The new elementary and secondary block grant removes Federal bureaucracy and gives States flexibility to fund their own priorities.” All of this will contribute to the [7.8% cut from the Department of Education](#).

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

LEGISLATION

House of Representatives

The Rural STEM Education Act ([H.R. 4979](#)), which directs the Director of the National Science Foundation to support STEM education and workforce in rural areas, has been moved from the Science, Space, and Technology to Committee to the calendar of the full House.

Rep. Barbara Lee [D-CA] introduced the Ronald V. Dellums Memorial Fellowship for Women of Color in STEAM and National Security Act ([H.R. 5922](#)). Named for the former Chairman of the Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives (1993-1995) who was a supporter of integrating LGBT individuals into the military. Since women of color are underrepresented in STEAM fields, this scholarship/ internship from the Department of Defense is in honor of him. It would fund 30 students, 15 of which will come from HBCUs and other minor-serving institutions, with scholarships of up to \$50,000.

Senate

Sen. Tim Kaine's [D-VA] A bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to establish a community college and career training grant program ([S. 3273](#)).

Senators Rob Portman [R-OH], Marco Rubio [R-FL], and Tom Cotton [R-AR] reintroduced the Foreign Influence Transparency Act ([S. 3313](#)) after almost two years. This bill aims to amend the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 to limit exemptions of people aiding foreign political agendas and the Higher Education to clarify the disclosures of [foreign gifts by institutions of greater than \\$50,000](#). This is mostly in response to the arrest of the Chair of Harvard's Chemistry Department.

HEARINGS AND OVERSIGHT

Title IX Impacts Higher Ed Negotiations

Secretary Betsy DeVos' changes to Title IX appear to be affecting the Senate's [negotiations](#) on the Higher Education Authorization (HEA) reauthorization according to Sen. Patty Murray [D-WA], the top Democrat in the Senate Education Committee. Secretary DeVos had proposed to more narrowly define sexual harassment from "any unwelcomed conduct of a sexual nature" to conduct "so severe, pervasive and objectively offensive" that it impedes a student's abilities to access school programs and activities. In addition, the proposal allows colleges and universities to not investigate on campus attacks, even if they are to occur in off-campus apartments, and allowing cross-examination of accusers. While Sen. Murray and Sen. Lamar Alexander [R-TN], chairman of the Senate Education Committee, have come to agreements on many areas of the HEA, the Title IX changes are drawing attention from women and civil rights groups.

Democrats Asks Trump Administration to Withdraw Support from Religious Discrimination

The Chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, Rep. Bobby Scott [D-VA] has sent letters to the [Health and Human Services](#), [Education](#), [Justice](#), and [Labor](#) Departments opposing the Trump administration's plans to allow organizations to accept federal grants while still only hiring people who follow their religious views. Rep. Scott argues that this “discriminate[s] against current and potential employees based on the organization's religious beliefs.”

In the Senate, [Sen. Murray and 15 other Democrats](#) believe that religious freedom rule would allow religious institutions to discriminate against women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Like Rep. Scott, Sen. Murray and her cosigners also sent a [letter](#) to the Department of Education stating they believe the proposed rule change would undermine Title IX, fail to protect students from discrimination, and inhibits insititutions' ability to protect people from discrimination.

IN RELATED NEWS...

GRADUATE SCHOOL AND CAMPUS CLIMATE

Income-Driven Loan Plans

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) examined how the increase in income-driven student loans has affected the federal budget. Income-driven loans determine how much a person owes based on their income and allows for loan forgiveness after 20-25 years. In the 2018-2019 academic year, the government loaned \$76 billion to 7.6 million students. However, in December of 2018, outstanding student loans issued by the federal government totaled [\\$1.4 trillion](#) (6.8 % of the GDP). [Around 45% of federal loans are being paid through income-driven student loans in 2017](#), which has much lower rates of default.

RELEVANT READS

The State of Higher Education

[Crisis Point: How Enrolling Management in the Merit-Aid Arms Race Are Derailing Public Higher Education](#)

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

[Congressional Budget Office: Income-Driven Repayment Plans for Student Loans: Budgetary Costs and Policy Options](#)

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