
DEC 2018/JAN 2019

REGION III

PUBLIC POLICY UPDATES



1. FEDERAL UPDATES

- House Democrats [voted](#) to nominate Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to be the next Speaker of the House by a vote of 203 to 32. Pelosi's nomination now heads to the full House for a vote at the beginning of the 116th Congress, where we expect she will be voted in as Speaker. Barring something unforeseen, this means that there will be no significant changes atop House Democrat leadership in the next Congress, and that the reported early priorities of the new House majority (infrastructure, healthcare and ethics reform bills) will remain the early priorities. Any House focus on higher education issues, such as Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization, will likely happen at the Committee level at the outset of the new Congress.
- ED [restored](#) federal recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) for one year, with the condition that ACICS become fully compliant within the next year.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) [tightened](#) interview requirements for immigrants seeking to move from conditional permanent resident status to standard residency. USCIS will now generally require permanent resident seekers to appear for an interview, while previously, visa officers were only required to interview applicants when the USCIS Director was not satisfied by the evidence presented by the applicant.
- In late December 2018, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos released two white papers on higher education issues, one focused on [accreditation](#) and one on a [wider range](#) of higher education topics. The accreditation paper outlines the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) views on the topic, emphasizing the need to remove barriers to innovation, and makes recommendations that are likely to be raised during the negotiated rulemaking sessions early in the new year. The second paper, entitled "Rethinking Higher Education," covers the Administration's point of view on the need for more innovation in higher education, that a four-year degree is not the standard to which every student should aspire, and concerns over campus free speech and the cost of attending institutions of higher education.
- The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [released](#) a report showing that national colleges completion rates have increased for the third year in a row. The fall 2012 cohort six-year completion rate was 1.5 percent above the fall 2011 cohort, and completion rates for black and Hispanic students rose more than their white and Asian counterparts, slightly narrowing the college completion gap. However, white and Asian students still graduate at much higher rates than black and Hispanic students.

2. TITLE IX UPDATES

- The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) proposed Title IX regulations were officially published November 29, 2018 in the Federal Register and will be open for public comment for 60 days. As a reminder, the rules would make significant changes to the Title IX policies issued under the Obama Administration, including a narrower definition of sexual harassment, allowing for a higher standard of evidence to be met in adjudicating sexual assault claims and allowing students accused of sexual assault to cross-examine their accusers.

3. FINANCIAL AID

- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) [announced](#) that it does not have the technical capacity currently to service key provisions of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act ([H.R. 3218](#)), also known as the "Forever GI Bill," including distributing housing allowances to veteran students. VA estimated that it will be able to fully implement the law for the 2020 Spring semester. In the meantime, VA will distribute GI bill housing benefits based on the U.S. Department of Defense's Basic Housing Allowance rates.
- In late December 2018, Congress passed the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act ([S.2248](#)), which includes a provision prohibiting colleges from collecting late fees from student veterans receiving GI bill benefits or requiring those student to take out additional loans as a result of delayed payments from VA. The bill now heads to the President's desk for signature. Additionally, in late December, the Senate passed the Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act ([S.3777](#)), which would create a group of specialists at VA who would be tasked with coming up with a plan to fix the mentioned erroneous payments, which VA would then be required to implement.
- On December 20, 2018, the Senate passed a bill to streamline the FAFSA. The bill, known as the [FAFSA Act](#), would amend the tax code and the Higher Education Act to allow the IRS to share taxpayer information directly with the Education Department. The bill would also allow data sharing between the IRS and the Education Department to verify the earnings of borrowers seeking to enroll in income-driven repayment.

4. STATE UPDATES

Florida: Anthony Sabatini (R) filed [HB 6007](#) for consideration during the 2019 legislative session which starts March 5. The bill would allow people with concealed weapons licenses to carry on college and university campuses.

Tennessee: Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) announced that he will not seek re-election when his current term is up in 2020. Alexander, who's current term as Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee is set to expire in 2020 as well, has been a champion for education issues throughout his career, including while serving as the Governor of Tennessee, the U.S. Secretary of Education and President of the University of Tennessee.

Texas: Higher Education Coordinating Board will be asking for an 8% increase in funding for the Texas Grant Program, which assists low income students. Full news story [here](#).

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

If you want to get more involved in public policy at the state level, the following states have State Public Policy Directors that you can contact. Here is the listing of State Public Policy Directors in Region III:

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This monthly newsletter is compiled by the NASPA Region III Public Policy Representative, Dr. Heidi Leming. If you would like to send suggestions for the next newsletter, please email heidi.leming@tbr.edu.