Federal Relations Update
April 19, 2013

Military Reinstates Tuition Assistance Programs

The Army, Air Force and Marines have reinstated their Tuition Assistance (TA) programs to all service members following the passage of the FY 2013 continuing resolution. The CR included an amendment authored by Senators Inhofe (R-OK) and Hagan (D-NC) to reinstate the program for the rest of the fiscal year.

Due to sequestration, the Department of Defense initially closed the program, which is used by active duty troops to help pay for college classes, allowing them to further their educations while enlisted.

FY2014 National Science Foundation (NSF) Appropriations Letter


Congress holds Committee Hearings on Federal Financial Aid Programs.

On Tuesday April 16, the 113th Congress held its first hearings on higher education reauthorization this year. The House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training, held a hearing entitled, “Keeping College Within Reach: The Role of Federal Student Aid Programs.” While the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) committee held a hearing entitled, “The Challenge of College Affordability: The Student Lens.”

Both hearings discussed the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The question was raised, whether the Federal government should maintain its traditional focus on improving access to higher education, or move toward a system tying federal student financial aid to student outcomes, job placement, or graduation rates.

Income-based repayment programs were also discussed. At the Senate hearing, one of the witnesses called for “streamlining” income-based repayment. During the House hearing, Rep. Tom Petri (R-WI) announced he will introduce [legislation] that enrolls all borrowers automatically in an income-based repayment program and collects loan payments through paycheck withholding -- the same system used for paying income taxes. Despite their differences, members of both parties stressed the need to simplify the application process for federal financial aid. In addition, Chairwoman Fox’s opening statement included support for President Obama’s proposal to “shift the calculation of student loan interest rates away from Washington politicians and toward a market-based formula.” Chairman Harkin indicated his displeasure in the lack of an interest rate cap in the President’s budget proposal.
Congress Asks Administration to Drop “gainful employment and state authorization” Regulations

On April 18, House Education and the Workforce Chairman John Kline (R-MN), along with committee members Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Rep. Robert Andrews (D-NJ), Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), and Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL), sent a letter urging Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to drop the regulations and instead work with Congress to address program integrity issues as part of the Higher Education Act reauthorization.

In the past, the Administration has used the regulatory process to define program quality, with several regulations sparking legal challenges. Congress has voted several times to voice their opposition to both issues and the debate has raised concerns on the impact of these regulations to students.

Senate “Gang of Eight” Introduces Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill
The Senate “Gang of Eight” released their comprehensive immigration reform bill this week known as the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013. Here is a summary of the bill. Additionally, the Office of Federal Relations will continue to review the legislation and will provide analysis next week on the bill’s impact on higher education.