House Higher Education Act

The House Education and Workforce Committee approved three bipartisan bills this week, as part of an effort to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. The legislative proposals will support innovation, strengthen transparency, and enhance financial counseling. The approved bills reflect a number of key principles guiding the reauthorization process:

- **H.R. 3136, Advancing Competency-Based Education Demonstration Project Act** — provides students new opportunities to receive a high-quality education in a way that best serves their personal and financial needs, through competency-based education demonstration projects.

- **H.R. 4983, Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act** — creates a new “College Dashboard” website to tell families consumer information about colleges, including financial aid information and graduation rates. The data would include non-traditional students as well as Pell Grant recipients (groups of students for whom the federal government doesn’t track completion rates). The legislation would also eliminate ED’s current College Navigator website.

- **H.R. 4984, Empowering Students Through Enhanced Financial Counseling Act** — increases financial counseling for students who take out federal loans or grants. It would also direct ED to develop an online tool that would help students “understand their rights and obligations” of having a federal student loan.

FY 2015 Appropriations

It is becoming clearer we will not see an omnibus bill before the November election, with a Continuing Resolution (CR) at least until the lame duck session. Senate leadership has indicated they don’t expect any further action during the 4-week period on the appropriations bills. Noting the bills generally attract a slew of controversial amendments. The move shields vulnerable Democrats from taking tough votes that could be used in campaign ads.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

The House approved the bipartisan WIA reauthorization, **H.R. 803, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** by a vote of 415 -6. This follows the Senate’s 95-3 vote last month with the President expected to sign in the near future. The bill streamlines the federally funded system of workforce development programs and applies a standard set of outcome measures to evaluate all federal job-training programs.

STEM Education Act of 2014

Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) along with Rep. Chris Collins (R-NY) introduced **H.R.5031, the STEM Education Act of 2014**. The bipartisan legislation, is compromised of sections from the Frontiers in
Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) Act of 2014 (H.R.4186) and the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2014 (H.R.4159). This legislation includes computer science as a STEM discipline. It also includes a section on informal STEM education, at the National Science Foundation to award grants to entities that research and develop innovative out-of-school STEM learning.

Campus Sexual Assault Report

Senator Claire McCaskill's (D-MO) released her report, Sexual Violence on Campus. The report draws on her national survey that collected responses from more than 300 colleges and universities — uncovering major lapses in staff training and institutional responses to student reports of sexual violence.

According to the report: More than 40 percent of colleges, for instance, said they haven't investigated a single case of sexual violence in the past five years and law-enforcement officials at 30 percent of the schools say they've received no training in handling reports of sexual assault.

The American Council on Education, called the report unfair, and was shaped and written to “excoriate” institutions. It “ignores how hard colleges and universities are working to address this complex societal issue,” and “ignores the fact that these are incredibly difficult cases to investigate and solve.”

Senator McCaskill plans to use the findings to help craft legislation with a bipartisan team including Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Marco Rubio (R-FL). They plan to release the bill in late August or early September as students head back to college.

Accelerating Biomedical Research Act

Senator Harkin (D-IA) is drafting The Accelerating Biomedical Research Act. The bill is intended to fix the funding restraints imposed on NIH by the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 and sequestration. It would allow for more predictable and sustainable growth for NIH than the agency has seen in over a decade. While the bill does not remove the budget caps imposed by the BCA through 2021, it would essentially restore the purchasing power the NIH would have had if funding had kept pace with inflation since 2003.

The bill includes a trigger of $29.9 billion for NIH, after which appropriators can provide up to $46.2 billion at the end of the six year period from FY 2016-2021. The additional funding provides an initial bump of 10% increases in the first two years, followed by 5% increases each year thereafter.