

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATES



*Inspiring educators so adults succeed and communities thrive*



## Government Relations Report: April

This report focuses on budget and appropriations issues.

Congress is on recess for another week.

The continuing resolution (CR) under which the government is operating expires on April 28. There is a need to determine how the government will be funded for the remainder of the year. There is still a certain lack of clarity about whether there will be a long-term CR to carry funding through to September 30, or an omnibus appropriations bill (or bills) that will make actual funding decisions on an account-by-account basis. In either case, there may need to be a short-term continuing resolution because work won't be completed by the 28th of the month.

Appropriations staff report that they have mostly completed work on the bills and that contentious funding issues and legislative riders will be hashed out at the leadership level.

We also understand that the appropriators have rejected the Trump administration's request to cut FY 2017 domestic discretionary funding to fund defense and to accommodate spending for the southwestern wall. The allocation for Labor, HHS, and Education has not been significantly changed, and it is possible that total Education Department funding could remain about the same, but there could be changes in individual funding levels from the House and Senate versions if there is an omnibus bill.

There remains a possibility that the Republican leadership will seek to accommodate at least part of the president's request to fund the wall, defund Planned Parenthood, or attach controversial riders. Democratic leaders in the Senate have threatened to shutdown the government if such funding, or language, is included in the appropriations bill.

While Congress has made progress on FY 2017, both House and Senate staff (and both Democrats and Republicans) report that they "are as much in the dark on FY 2018" as everyone else. There are reports that release of the administration's budget will be delayed until June. We do know that the budget caps for FY 2018 are set in law and that the FY 2018 cap is several billion dollars below this year's level. This means that without another bipartisan budget agreement to raise the caps on spending there will be continued downward

pressure on non-defense discretionary spending, which is already at historic lows as a percentage of gross domestic product.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "2018 will be the eighth straight year of austerity in NDD [non-defense discretionary] appropriations. The 2018 cap is scheduled to fall by almost \$3 billion relative to the prior year's cap, reflecting the imposition, for the first time, of full sequestration cuts, because the most recent bipartisan sequestration-relief agreement expires after 2017. Cumulatively, this cut will bring the non-defense cap 16 percent below the comparable 2010 level, after adjusting for inflation."

A similar budget proposed in FY 2016 ran into difficulty in Congress because it did not cut enough for some and cut far too much for others. There is ample evidence that the cuts proposed by the Trump administration will again face some skepticism in Congress. For example, Hal Rogers, former chair of the House Appropriations Committee issued this statement:

"While we have a responsibility to reduce our federal deficit, I am disappointed that many of the reductions and eliminations proposed in the president's skinny budget are draconian, careless, and counterproductive. In particular, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has a long-standing history of bipartisan support in Congress because of its proven ability to help reduce poverty rates and extend basic necessities to communities across the Appalachian region. We will certainly review this budget proposal, but Congress ultimately has the power of the purse. As the full budget picture emerges in the coming weeks, I am optimistic that we can work with the administration to responsibly fund the federal government, including those agencies which serve as vital economic lifelines in rural parts of the country that are still working to overcome substantial challenges."

Senator Lindsey Graham specifically referred to proposed cuts in foreign aid, "It's dead on arrival - it's not going to happen. It would be a disaster."

According to Reuters, "Moderate Republicans expressed unease with potential cuts to popular domestic programs." Lisa Murkowski, who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, attacked plans to cut or eliminate programs that help the poor pay heating bills, provide aid for localities to deal with wastewater, and subsidize air travel in rural areas like her home state of Alaska. "We need to remember that these programs are not the primary drivers of our debt," Murkowski said.

We do have some evidence that members of Congress are increasingly concerned about spending levels for education and workforce programs. We

have met with several members of the House and Senate Labor, HHS, and Education Appropriations subcommittees and all expressed support for these programs, recognized the need to invest in America's workforce, and emphasized the need for American workers to have the education necessary to compete with workers elsewhere in the world. Several, in particular, cited the need to better educate workers in rural areas. Others referred to the results of PIAAC studies, which show younger workers in the U.S. near the bottom in international comparisons.

## What You Can Do

COABE and the state directors of adult education have launched a joint public awareness campaign called [\*\*Educate and Elevate: An Investment in America's Future\*\*](#) that says, "America is at a crossroads. We need every person in our nation ready to contribute to America's competitiveness."

You can learn more about the campaign and how to participate by going to the COABE website and following the prompts. **Teachers and students can go [HERE](#) to write a letter or make a call to their elected officials to support the campaign.**

Representative state directors were on Capitol Hill last month to "Educate and Elevate" and explain the importance of adult education for our nation's future.

The COABE Hill Day took place on April 26, where COABE and NCSDAE leaders met with Secretary Betsy DeVos and several other legislators. Almost 50 state-level leaders in adult education converged on the Hill to conduct over 80 meetings with members of Congress and staff to promote the message that "Investing in adult education is good for the economy."

The House is on recess the week of May 8 and again the week of May 29. The Senate is on recess the week of May 29. These are opportunities to educate members of Congress on the importance of adult education by inviting them and their staffs to visit programs and participate in recognition ceremonies, as well as extending invitations for members to attend and speak at graduations.