Good Morning. At the conclusion of this message please find the Federal Advocacy and Public Policy Update for December 13, 2021. If you have any questions regarding the information found in this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Have a good week.

Best,

J.T.

Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update

December 13, 2021

Congressional Update

Congress Nears Agreement on Nation's Debt Limit

For much of the past calendar year lawmakers in Congress have been mired in disagreement over whether and how to raise the nation's borrowing authority. Often referred to as the "debt ceiling," this is the allowable amount that the federal government is legally permitted to borrow to pay for expenses already incurred. While a short-term increase of the debt ceiling was narrowly passed earlier this fall, Congressional Republicans have been withholding their support for further action on this issue, arguing that Democrats should simply pass the measure without their support-a move made difficult by the Senate's required 60 vote threshold to withstand a potential filibuster. Should Congress fail to increase or suspend this borrowing authority, the federal government would be forced to default on its existing debt obligations which would have a catastrophic impact on the economy.

On Thursday, December 9, lawmakers announced that they had reached agreement on a path forward on this issue. Lawmakers have crafted a narrow legislative package that would, among other items, temporarily suspend the Senate's filibuster on a forthcoming bill that would increase the nation's borrowing limit. By temporarily removing the ability to filibuster this forthcoming legislation, Senators will be able to clear the bill by a simple majority vote. While legislation to formally increase the debt limit has not yet been passed by Congress, this proposal is widely expected to be enacted into law ahead of the current December 15 deadline when borrowing authority is expected to expire.

Administration Update

USED Approves Wisconsin ARP Plan

Following the American Rescue Plan's (ARP) passage earlier this spring, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) distributed two-thirds of this funding to states via a prescribed formula. USED held back the remainder of these funds until states and territories submitted plans detailing how they would make use of these resources to support students as they recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. On Monday, December 6, USED approved one more of these plans, releasing these additional funds to the state of Wisconsin. Only a handful of additional states have their ARP plans awaiting approval. The most current status of all state ARP plans, including highlights of plans already approved, can be found here.

Congress Confirms Bruce as USED IG and Rosenworcel at FCC

Late last Friday, December 3, the Senate formally confirmed Sandra Bruce to be the next Inspector General (IG) for USED. Bruce was previously Deputy IG for the Department for a number of years prior to her formal nomination this past June. USED's IG office is the primary entity responsible for investigating and identifying fraud, waste, and abuse within ED funds, programs, and operations. More on the announcement from the Department can be found here. In addition, the Senate voted 68 to 31 to confirm Jessica Rosenworcel's re-appointment to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), putting her in place to be the first permanent chair of the agency under President Biden. Rosenworcel will also be the first female chair in the 86-year history of the FCC.

USED Announces Priorities for Discretionary Funding

On December 10, USED published the agency's final supplemental priorities and definitions for discretionary grant programs in the Federal Register. These priorities will be used by USED to guide decisions in the future regarding specific policy areas and related needs as part of grant competitions. The Department adopted the following six final priorities:

1. Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Students, Educators, and Faculty
2. Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities
3. Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning
4. Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs
5. Increasing Postsecondary Education Access, Affordability, Completion, and Post-Enrollment Success
6. Strengthening Cross-Agency Coordination and Community Engagement to Advance Systemic Change