

From: AACC Office of Government Relations
Date sent: 03/03/2017 01:03:39 pm
Subject: AACC Washington Watch

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Washington Watch

AACC's Federal Policy Update



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March 3, 2017

This week, President Trump addressed a joint session of Congress, laying out his vision in broad themes. The president's FY 2018 budget request, expected to be unveiled mid-March, will include a \$54 billion increase in defense spending, offset by cuts to non-defense spending (including education). This budget plan will probably not provide program-level details on funding. A more detailed budget may be released later this spring.

Register Now for AACC's 97th Annual Convention

Meet us in New Orleans for this year's convention, April 22–25. For more information, visit the [AACC website](#).

Advocates in Action

Join us in Washington, DC, June 12–13 at AACC's Advocates in Action. The event is designed to enable community college leaders to gain access to key executive branch officials and senior Hill staff on the relevant committees and participate in discussions about critical issues and legislation. Registration and additional information will be available shortly for this event.

White House HBCU Executive Order

On February 28, President Trump signed an [executive order](#) on the White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. This executive order moves the initiative from the U.S. Department of Education to the White House, providing greater visibility for the HBCUs. For more about the recent HBCU meeting at the White House, see [Inside Higher Ed](#).

Federal Agency Resources & News

Applications for Strengthening Institutions Program Awards—The Department of Education (ED) published two Federal Register notices on March 1 inviting applications for new awards for fiscal year 2017 for the Strengthening Institutions program (Title III-A of the Higher Education Act). ED is conducting two separate competitions this spring for the Strengthening Institutions program. The [first](#) does not require eligible institutions to address ED priorities. The [second](#) stipulates that “applications must address an absolute priority and may address a competitive priority.” Colleges may apply under both competitions, but may only receive one grant.

Energy and Employment Report Issued—The U.S. Department of Energy released its second annual [U.S. Energy and Employment Report](#), providing an analysis of the various energy sectors of the U.S. economy as well as information about energy-related sectors. The 2017 report also provides information about state-level energy and employment. These state reports highlight the growth or loss of jobs in specific energy sectors.

Policy Related Reports

Higher Graduation Rate for Community Colleges—The official graduation rate for 2-year public institutions for 2015 was 23.5%, up from 21.8% the previous year, according to [a report](#) issued by ED. ED calculated this rate for a cohort of first-time, full-time students at 150% of normal time to completion, i.e., 3 years for associate degree-seeking students. The graduation rate measured at 200% of normal program completion is almost double that of the on-time graduation rate. This is a clear indication that tracking students longer more accurately captures student success.

Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) recently introduced legislation that would create an additional graduation rate, 300% of normal time to completion, for community college students. AACC has long advocated for this graduation rate. The bill, [S. 351](#), also would provide student financial aid and admissions information.

Community College Students Struggle Making Ends Meet—The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCSSE) issued a [special report](#) on the role of community college student finances, noting that many experienced financial challenges. The report was based on a survey of a subset of students who were administered the CCCSE survey, comprising almost 100,000 students at 177 colleges. Questions included the students' views of their financial situation, financial management skills, financial planning practices, and financial literacy, as well as demographic information. One third of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their present financial situation, almost as many (32%) as those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. A majority (51%) reported that they had too much student loan debt, with 63% saying that they live paycheck to paycheck.

Tax Expenditures Part of Government Investment in Higher Education—A [new Pew Charitable Trusts report](#) aims to highlight what it purports is frequently excluded from debates about government investment—federal and state—in higher education: tax expenditures. Provisions of the tax codes, such as special deductions, credits, exclusions, and exemptions, which allow filers to reduce their income liability, according to the report, “result in lower federal and state government revenue. They are called tax expenditures because they are similar to direct spending both in their budgetary impacts and in the way they can benefit recipients.” According to the report, at the federal level, tax provisions for students and their families amounted to \$35 billion in fiscal year 2014, or 14% more than the Pell Grant program. Tax expenditures vary across states, with most (41 states and DC) having a broad-based income tax, some have 529 plans, and a few special tax credits.

Student Veterans Using Post-9/11 GI Benefits Succeed in Higher Education—The [first report](#) on the National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST) project, which is a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Student Clearinghouse integrating data on veterans and tracking their experience in higher education, was released this week. Its intent was to see how veterans

using Post-9/11 GI education benefits fared in postsecondary education and whether the cost to taxpayers of the Post-9/11 GI bill was worth continuing. The report examined postsecondary progress and completion and with respect to both, veterans were shown to succeed. "Seven out of ten student veterans in the NVEST Project either have completed a post-secondary certificate or degree or were working on one at the time of the data match," according to the report.

Completion Rates by State and Starting Institution—A new [National Student Clearinghouse report](#) on state-level completion data supplements a [2016 national report](#) on student attainment rates. Among the findings are that in four states—Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota, and Virginia—one fifth of the students who started at a public 2-year institution earn a baccalaureate degree within 6 years. See the [CC Daily](#).

State WIOA Implementation Legislation—Now available on the National Conference of State Legislatures website is a [searchable database](#) of state legislation on the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The database includes legislation enacted in 2015 concerning numerous topics, such as sector strategies, career pathways, adult education, and career training and can be searched by state, topic, primary sponsor, bill number, or keyword.

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