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Washington Watch

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Congress just approved a week-long continuing resolution (CR) to avert a government shutdown. The current stopgap appropriations bill expires this evening so the pressure was on to approve the short-term CR (H.J.Res. 99) to extend the spending levels for FY 2017. Congress expects to complete efforts on a final funding measure for FY 2017 shortly, but has been unable to reach an accord about several policy riders in the omnibus bill.

Earlier this week, the Senate confirmed President Trump's nominees Sonny Perdue as the secretary of agriculture and Alexander Acosta as secretary of labor.

[Join AACC on Capitol Hill](#)

AACC is hosting a new 2-day public policy and advocacy event, [Advocates in Action](#), in Washington, DC, June 12-13. The program is designed to strengthen and leverage your relationships with your congressional delegation. Together we will advance the national community college agenda at a critical time for our colleges and students. Rep. Brett Guthrie, chair of the House Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education and Workforce Education, will speak and David Wessel of the Brookings Institution will be our keynote speaker. Participate in interactive sessions with key executive branch officials and senior congressional staff. Make your voice heard on Capitol Hill. [Register now.](#)

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Executive Order on H-1B Visas May Hurt Recruitment of International Students—The order signed by President Trump, better known as “[Buy American and Hire American](#),” is designed to increase federal oversight of the H-1B visa program as well as eradicate fraud and abuse in overseas guest-worker programs. It may have the consequence of discouraging international students from attending colleges in the United States.

Suspension of IRS Data Retrieval Tool Prompts ED to Offer Some Relief—The U. S. Department of Education (ED) [announced](#) institutions will be allowed, effective immediately, certain flexibilities to fulfill the verification requirements for both the 2016-17 and 2017-18 FAFSA cycles. AACC and ACCT sent a joint letter to the secretaries of the Departments of Education and Treasury urging an expeditious resolution of the security concerns that caused a suspension of the data retrieval tool.

ED Seeks Comments on FAFSA—Interested parties may [submit comments](#) on proposed changes to the 2018-19 FAFSA cycle. Comments, which should be submitted on the [regulations.gov portal](#) for Docket ID Number ED-2017-ICCD-0044-0001, are due by June 16, 2017.

Uneven Growth in Rural Educational Attainment—This month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the 2017 edition of [Rural Education at a Glance](#). Rural Americans have made great strides in their educational attainment, with 3 out of 10 now holding an associate degree or higher. Even so, a gap exists between rural and urban residents resulting in differences in economic outcomes, such as earnings and employment. There also are gaps within the rural population based on age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Women are outpacing men in earning degrees while racial and ethnic minorities in rural areas lag behind their white counterparts.

Seven out of 10 High School Graduates Enrolled in College—According to a [newly released report](#) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2.2 million, or 69.7%, of 2016 high school graduates enrolled in college.

Policy Related Reports

Policy Forum on Improving Higher Education and Post Collegiate Outcomes—Earlier this week, Dr. Charlene Dukes, president of Prince George’s Community College and immediate past chair of the AACC Board of Directors, participated on a panel focused on policy options to better finance higher education at a [Hamilton Project forum](#). Five new policy proposals were released at the event. Dukes was asked to comment on two of the proposals, including [one](#) proposing “a federal matching grant for public postsecondary institutions that implement free college [and another](#) discussing reforms to Pell Grants and postsecondary policies to address job loss and improve retraining.” Two other panels focused on a risk-sharing proposal and a couple of K-12 oriented proposals to address teacher shortages and the college and career pipeline for disengaged students, respectively.

Completion Rates Vary by Race and Ethnicity—The National Student Clearinghouse released a [supplement](#) to its [completion report](#) focused on race and ethnicity. The findings are yet another confirmation of the attainment gaps among racial and ethnic groups. “The overall completion rate for students who started in 2-year public institutions was higher for white and Asian students (45.1% and 43.8%, respectively) than Hispanic and black students (33% and 25.8%, respectively).” The differences in completion rates are even starker for students at 4-year institutions who started at a community college (with or without receiving an associate degree first). “While almost one in four Asian students and one in five white students had completed this transfer pathway by the end of the six-year study period, just one in 10 Hispanic students and about one in 12 black students did.”

Early Insights into AACC’s Pathways Project—The Community College Research Center prepared [a report](#) on how the 30 community colleges that were selected to participate in AACC’s Pathways Project are planning and implementing guided pathways reforms. Specifically, the report describes the various ways in which the participating colleges are approaching each of the model’s four principle areas, including mapping pathways to student end goals; helping students choose and enter a program pathway; keeping students on path; and ensuring that students are learning.

Negative Relationship between Poverty Levels and FAFSA Completion—A [study](#) conducted by the University of Pittsburgh and published by the National College Access Network (NCAN) shows that “on average, for every 10 percentage point difference in the percent of children 5 to 17 living in poverty, the district FAFSA completion rate is about 3 percentage points lower. The gap in FAFSA filing between the poorest and wealthiest districts is quite large within states.”

State and Local Support for Higher Education Lags FY 2008 Levels—The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO) released this month the FY 2016 [State Higher Education Finance report](#) and accompanying data. The nearly \$90 billion amount in state and local expenditures on higher education is actually a decline, the first in 4 years, adjusted for inflation. As usual, the picture is not uniform across states, with some showing higher per-student support (33 states), while the remaining 17 and the District of Columbia experienced a decline. According to SHEEO’s press release, “average state and local government support per student remains 17% below FY 2008 levels and is lower in 45 states than it was before the Great Recession.”

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