

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Marie Bennett and I'm **nassgap's** New Washington D.C. contact, replacing Bart Astor. President Cargill (VT) introduced me via the listserve some months back but this is my first newsletter report to the entire membership.

It's been a quick start up for me, to say the least. **nassgap's** Federal Relations Chair, Chas Treadwell, reminds me that my new engagement is fairly likened to herding cats. That's a skill set I'll continue to hone, but as I write you from the eyes of the many storms all around the D.C. beltway, may I say thanks for the opportunities. But I'm not alone, Chas and Marilyn do much to keep **nassgap** and me on the right path during these crazy times.

BUDGET RESOLUTIONS

\$\$\$\$ First there are the matters of money. Federal appropriations activities for FY08 and FY 09 have been at their usual high energy level of the first quarter of the calendar year following the State of the Union address. The FY08 LEAP appropriation was reduced by about 1.75% (an across-the-board type action) and the President's FY09 appropriations bill would reduce it by 100% (fondly called "elimination").

The House & Senate passed their respective budget resolutions for FY 09 appropriations just last week. For function 500, the Congressional resolutions reject the President's FY09 appropriations bill with regard to function 500. Details will be known after the Congress returns from their Spring recess and they go to conference.

nassgap marked the various appropriation events by contributing to the efforts of the Student Aid Alliance and the Council on Education Funding (CEF) annual list of funding requests and press releases designed to inform the Hill of how much should be minimally appropriated and why.

In addition **nassgap** authored and issued its own press release. As in past years, we seek \$100m and hope to, as the song says, "hang on to what we got."

REAUTHORIZATION

Then there is the matter of the authorizing laws. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) has picked up speed as it charges down the other side of the Hill. The Senate passed its bill (S. 1642) last summer & the House passed its bill (H.R. 4137) in February. Conferees began intense almost non-stop meetings hoping to get a bill in the hands of the President before the March 31 extension of the HEA expired.

The efforts were significant, but when it became apparent that goal could not be met, yet another continuing resolution (lucky #13, I think) was passed keeping the HEA as is alive through April 30. Don't bet the mortgage on it, but word in the alley ways is that the President will have a final bill in his hands to sign before the end of April, mid-April being the target.

What are they conferencing about? Let's understand that the two bills combined are over 1500 pages. No small wonder it will take some work to cover all the differences. And, there are some. Here are four that deserve your attention and that **nassgap** is keeping its sights on:

1. As my predecessor reported to you last year, the Senate's version of the HEA will significantly impact **nassgap** members with the replacement of LEAP/SLEAP with LEAP/GAP. The GAP (Grants for Access and Persistence) is designed with the intention of encouraging states to form partnerships with colleges, non-education businesses, and philanthropic organizations to provide low-income students with increased need based grant aid, early information, mentoring and outreach services. The program has some provisions that may be troublesome to implement.

To inform conferees of preferred ways to deliver on the good intentions of the Senate, **nassgap** sent a letter suggesting improvements to Senators Kennedy and Enzi and Representatives Miller and McKeon on March 14. The matters given focus in this correspondence include a call to revert to current SLEAP guidelines rather than pass the complex minimum awarding requirements that will occur using GAP language; modify the troublesome GAP award notification provision; and adopt the higher GAP federal share provisions and administrative allowances of the House bill.



2. Your state governors and NASSGAP have been ardent in following the matter of a **new Maintenance of Effort (MOE)** requirements found in the House bill. The bill contains many provisions aimed at college costs. The National Governor's Association (NGA) opposed the entire provision that addressed total expenditures of states on higher education (not just student grants). The NGA viewed this as federal intrusion into state matters.

nassgap response was two fold. First, **nassgap** developed a joint letter to Congress that was signed off on by some of our peer associations that focused on the consequence of linking this provision to funding for GAP. Specifically the signors agreed that such a link would hurt needy students. In addition, **nassgap's** March 14 letter to Congress (mentioned above) also expressed its support of the NGA position that such a provision would likely hurt state support of higher education over the long haul.

3. In its March 14 correspondence to Congress, **nassgap** also supported the call for the House to recede to the Senate provisions to **authorize the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance through October 1, 2013.** The House bill would sunset the committee in 2011.
4. **nassgap** is tracking several matters related to the **simplification of the FAFSA.** While both bills call for the use of IRS data to populate the FAFSA, one looks to a pilot, while another would give the Secretary authority to move forward with the full use of prior-prior year data. There is also some talk on the street that the conferees are looking at the FAFSA questions, presumably with the intent of eliminating some.

nassgap has been in touch with the ED and learned that progress has been made and few hurdles are left that would **use current base year data from the IRS.** Our association colleagues are also helping us monitor the matter of FAFSAA questions and we expect to be at the table as needed. Further, your NASSGAP spring conference committee is securing ED speakers and others to address this matter in-depth at that important time.

CREDIT CRUNCH, CASH FOR COLLEGE

A SPRING CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

One last money matter. Clearly the condition of our national \$\$\$\$ economy and that of your states is a growing concern. The students you serve and their families are beginning to express their concerns out loud. There have been many conversations, speeches, and testifying moments at congressional committee meetings and hearings in Washington, D.C. and across the country. News of the credit crunch, oil prices, mortgage defaults, and national deficit create significant anxiety for nearly any one who has two cents to lose. The impact of these events on money for college, principally (pun intended) loan funds, may have some consequences as early as this next school year. Again, your spring conference committee is planning a session to help us sort through the morass and understand what the true implications could be.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Finally, leadership in our sister associations has experienced some significant changes. NASFAA welcomes Dr. Phillip R. Day as its new president and CEO. Most recently Dr. Day served as chancellor of the City College of San Francisco. ACE welcomes former University of North Carolina (UNC) President Molly Corbett Broad as its new president, succeeding Dr. David Ward. **nassgap** is hoping to introduce these leaders to its membership at the spring conference.

CONTACT INFORMATION

I welcome your comments, questions and suggestions. You can call me at 301-984-0110 or send an email to me at m2bennett@comcast.net. I look forward to meeting you at the spring conference in my home town, Washington, D.C. in May. I can't imagine a better time to be here. See you then.

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