



## **Policy Update: Acting Secretary of Education Called to Capitol Hill**

*Lewis-Burke Associates LLC – February 26, 2016*

On February 24, Acting Secretary of Education John King testified before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce about the President's fiscal year (FY) 2017 budget request for the Department of Education (ED) during its hearing titled "Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education." The hearing was one of three this week at which Acting Secretary King testified. During the hearing, King emphasized that the actions of ED are guided by three main principles: ensuring every child has the opportunity to receive an excellent education; supporting teachers and elevating the teaching profession; and improving access, affordability, and completion in higher education.

The hearing was widely attended by Members from both sides of the aisle, alternating praise and criticism for the proposed ED budget. Chairman John Kline (R-MN) led his party's opposition to the proposals in the budget request by criticizing the utilization of mandatory funding streams, the creation of new expensive programs, and the perceived underfunding of special education. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), who is the presumed successor as Chair of the House Ed and Workforce Committee upon Chairman Kline's retirement, questioned the actions and authority of the Office of Civil Rights at ED. Other Members touched upon the issues of student loan debt and federal loan interest rates; criticized the College Scorecard; and questioned the regulatory burden placed on colleges and universities. Representatives Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) and Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) expressed concern that ED had overlooked Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in its budget request. Other Members lauded ED's expansion of the Pell Grant program to include year-round Pell Grants, income-driven repayment programs, and targeting Federal Work Study funds to students with the greatest financial need. The budget request for ED is unlikely to gain traction in Congress due to partisan disagreements and the budget request's reliance on mandatory funding for new programs.

The following day, King was back on the Hill, this time on the Senate-side. On February 25, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing to examine King's nomination to serve as Secretary of Education, focusing on implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* and higher education issues including preventing campus sexual assault; simplifying the financial aid process; and addressing student loan servicing, interest rates, and repayment. This hearing followed President Obama's nomination of John King as Secretary of Education on February 11. King, formerly an Acting Deputy Secretary of Education, has served as Acting Secretary since Arne Duncan stepped down from the post at the end of 2015. Chairman of the Senate HELP Committee Lamar Alexander (R-TN) encouraged the President to appoint a nominee, and has promised an expedited confirmation hearing. The Committee will consider the mark-up of King's nomination on March 9.

### *Sources and Additional Information:*

- An archived webcast and witness testimony for the hearing on the ED budget request can be found at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=400263>.
- A full archived webcast and witness testimony for the February 25 hearing on King's nomination can be found at <http://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/nomination-of-dr-john-king-to-serve-as-secretary-of-education>.