

House Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee Holds Hearing On President Trump's 2020 Budget Proposal for Education Summary  
by Shayla Britton

For the better part of the day Tuesday, March 26, 2019, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos presented and responded to questions regarding the Trump Administration's 2020 Budget Proposal on Education before the House Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee.

Detailed below is a brief summary of the key topics related to higher education policy discussed during the hearing entitled "Department of Education Budget Request for FY 2020" led by Subcommittee Chair Rosa Delauro (D-CT) and Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK).

Chairwoman Delauro set the tone for the hearing from the Democrats' perspective, when, as part of her opening statement she noted, "I believe this budget [proposal] is cruel and will hurt middle class, working, low income families that most need our help."

This in response to the Administration's proposed budget cutting a total estimated \$9 billion from its own Department of Ed., supporting that further funding of the department—and students from k-12 and post-secondary education innovative initiative supporters—do not necessitate any more funding.

Ranking Member Cole from across the aisle, opened, emphasizing additional support in the proposal's determinations to prioritize charter schools, supporting English learners, school safety, educational innovative efforts, best practices, and school choice. Highlighting in particular the Administration's proposal's \$5 billion tax cut for donations to funding for access to postsecondary education – a tax cut the administration is supporting dollar for dollar for voluntary contributions to non-profits that provide scholarships to students.

As part of her testimony, Secretary DeVos shared with the Committee that the Administration is supporting key policy proposal to reduce Gainful Employment, Borrower Defense rules, and more. Recommending what the Secretary called a rejection of "one size fits all industrial age reform" proposals by focusing on educational freedom and student choice efforts to give students and potential borrowers choices for their education.

Secretary DeVos also stated that the Administration seeks to expand the use of Pell Grants to quality, short term certificate programs, to be used for career and technical education to help streamline and benefit student repayment outcomes for those programs.

The response to such support for our community from the Administration was echoed in support from the Committee. Ranking Member Cole, along with other Republicans, expressed their utmost backing for this expansion to short term certificate programs' eligibility for Pell.

Chairwoman Delauro and other Democratic Committee members made viable inquiries about how those expansions would alleviate and help student borrowers in both traditional and nontraditional

programs, if the Administration did not include any increase in Pell funding to account for inflation or the influx of potential short term program borrowers under the same allocations for Pell.

DeVos cited the potential for students opting for shorter programs to limit funding, in hopes of addressing student loan repayment deficiencies and financial literacy concerns, which received increasingly less support from Democrats on the committee. Tensions also flared when cuts to child care initiatives for low-income students took place – leading to a more in-depth discussion about its impact on degree completion and extended to implications concerning repayment outcomes.

Congressman Andy Harris (R-MD) expressed support for expansions under the Administration’s budget proposals for short term Pell eligibility and pre-apprenticeship programs, while Ranking Member Cole expressed concern for definitions for those pre-apprenticeship programs that lacked any clear guidance from the Department.

Secretary DeVos noted multiple times that prioritization within the budget caused the Department to make “tough decisions” in the Department’s proposal to diminish funding and rescind recommendations that would have benefited Sexual Assault victim’s on college campuses.

Congresswoman Louis Frankel (D-FL) asserted that such roll backs of protections for those students may be subject to violations of Title IX. She then went on to express her concerns with other roll backs, including the Department’s attempts to lessen student protections under Borrower Defense – mandatory arbitration, transparency to students, and institutional accountability.

While not all members used their time to focus on the issues related to the Administration’s/Department’s regulatory changes, it was clear that none of the revisions or pending Final Rules are supported by the Democrats.

There does however seem to be some potential common ground regarding modifications of Federal Work Study Programs and pre-apprenticeship programs for students working towards specific careers in post-secondary education.