



Florida School Boards Association FEDERAL NEWS & INFORMATION

February 28, 2022

BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS

The conversations that will be top of mind this week for members of Congress and President Joe Biden will be very different than what they had planned. President Biden will address a joint session of Congress on Tuesday, March 1. The evolving situation in Ukraine will have speechwriters working around the clock and up to the last minute on Tuesday. The education community had hoped that the president might discuss the issues that are plaguing schools, districts and states as they continue to navigate teaching and learning during a pandemic, as well as the education policies that are expected to become a focus for the Congressional mid-terms and 36 gubernatorial elections this fall. That seems unlikely, but there will be many, many drafts considered and discarded in coming days.

As for the status of appropriations, while negotiators presumably make progress on an FY 2022 omnibus bill, recent developments will affect the expected supplemental spending bill. With war breaking out between Russia and Ukraine, and high COVID rates seeing an encouraging decline, it seems likely that the administration will request emergency supplemental funding to address both issues. As for FY 2022 spending, the deployment of troops and weapons to Europe make it increasingly likely that more members of Congress will be inclined to support an FY 2022 omnibus package that has a significant increase for both defense and nondefense programs. The education community continues to believe that increases for education and other domestic priorities will not be as high as requested by the White House, but education will still see more funds than it has in the last four years.

Some education advocates also are watching closely negotiations on a large competitiveness bill. The House and Senate have passed bills that are similar in many ways, but very different in others. In fact, the House bill is over 1,000 pages longer than the Senate package. While conversations with Hill staff suggest that House and Senate staff are talking to each other about various provisions, it has been reported that there are large controversial issues that will need to be resolved between parties and chambers. Those hoping for expedient debate of a negotiated package will be disappointed. A final bill is unlikely to be anywhere near President Biden's desk before late spring.

This week will be a busy one. The day after the State of the Union Address, a House Education and Labor Subcommittee will be holding a hearing on minority serving institutions. Appropriations leaders and staff will meet as they hope to reach agreement on an omnibus before March 11, when the current continuing resolution expires. And, of course, the country will be watching what unfolds in Ukraine.

ED AND USDA HOST BRIEFING ON RURAL STEM EDUCATION

On Thursday, February 24, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) held a briefing on opportunities, obstacles and resources regarding rural STEM education. Leslie Poynter, group leader for the Rural Education Achievement Program, began the discussion by establishing the many ways that ED supports rural communities through agency partnerships, title program funding, discretionary grant opportunities and unprecedented funding from the America Rescue Plan. Dr. Allen Pratt, executive director for the National Rural Education Association (NREA) provided context for STEM education and development in rural communities. Dr. Pratt emphasizes that rural communities are not monolithic, but they do all have the potential to be highly successful in producing high school graduates who are workforce ready through certifications, especially through programs such as the NREA's Raising Rural Grant Challenge. Dr. Pam Buffington, director of rural and ready STEM initiatives for the Economic Development Center calls for a reframing of the rural narrative that is centered on the deficit. In these communities, it is crucial to tap into



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deep and applied STEM knowledge that builds on prior experiences, informs student learning and provides opportunities to establish equity in education. Dr. Buffington believes that we can increase student achievement and engagement in STEM education by leveraging existing strong relationships, reinforcing the commitment to place-based education and building on multi-generational connections to the schools as community centers. The webinar included Antonio Tijerino, president & CEO of the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, Jeff Sallee, national program leader for the Division of Youth and 4-H in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Regina B. Schofield, director of corporate engagement and education outreach for Battelle. These panelists each shared their experiences living and working within rural communities and provided valuable insights on how we can continue to support rural STEM learning, while acknowledging the diversity and uniqueness within each community. For more information, click [here](#).