



ML Strategies Legislative Update

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ML Strategies, LLC  
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20004 USA  
202 296 3622  
[www.mlstrategies.com](http://www.mlstrategies.com)

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## **MLS 2017 Outlook: Higher Education Act Reauthorization**

The Higher Education Act (HEA) is the cornerstone of the Federal government's commitment to post-secondary education. The HEA governs the Department of Education's programs on accreditation, international and graduate education, teacher training and, perhaps more importantly, dozens of financial aid programs for students. The HEA was first signed into law in 1965 and has been reauthorized at various times since, most recently in 2008. That reauthorization expired at the end of 2013, but there have been several temporary extensions since that time.

### **Executive Branch Agenda**

- Work with Congress on reforms to ensure universities are making a good faith effort to reduce the cost of college and student debt in exchange for the federal tax breaks and tax dollars.
- Ensure that the opportunity to attend a two or four-year college, or to pursue a trade or a skill set through vocational and technical education, will be easier to access, pay for, and finish.
- Oppose proposals for tuition-free public higher education.
- Implementation of an income-contingent repayment plan for student loans with payments capped at 12% of the borrower's income, cancelling any remaining debt after 15 years.
- Support for technical institutions, online universities, lifelong learning, and work-based learning in the private sector.

### **President-elect Trump's Appointee for Secretary of Education**

President-elect Trump has named Betsy DeVos to head the Department of Education. A former chair of the Michigan Republican Party and current chair of the American Federation for Children, an advocacy group focused on school choice, DeVos is a well-known champion of charter schools. She serves on the board for the Foundation for Excellence in Education, a school standards

organization founded by former Florida governor Jeb Bush. Having focused on elementary and secondary education reform, it is unclear what the incoming Secretary's priorities may be for higher education, but she has won praise from mainstream Republicans like Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education in the George W. Bush administration, and former Michigan governor John Engler, who is now president of the Business Roundtable. Despite her lack of experience in higher education – something she has in common with numerous other former Secretaries of Education – the DeVos family foundation has made significant financial contributions to public and private colleges and universities in Michigan.

### **Congressional Committee Leadership**

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee will continue to be led by Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN), who has a particularly strong interest in education policy having served as Secretary of Education in the George H.W. Bush Administration. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) will serve as the Ranking Member. The House Committee on Education and the Workforce returns to the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress with Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC) assuming the chairmanship, and Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA) continuing as Ranking Member.

### **Potential Legislative Activity**

The HEA is organized into eight titles:

- 1) General Provisions – Covering costs of higher education, administrative provisions for delivery of student financial assistance, and lender institutions requirements relating to education loans;
- 2) Teacher Quality Enhancement – Covering teacher quality partnership grants and enhancing teacher education;
- 3) Institutional Aid – Covering American Indian tribally controlled colleges and universities, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions, predominately black institutions, Native American-serving non-tribal institutions, Asian American and Native Pacific Islander-serving institutions, Historically Black College and University capital financing, and the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program;
- 4) Student Assistance – Covering Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), special programs for students whose families are engaged in migrant and seasonal farm work, the Robert C. Byrd Scholarship Program, the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, TEACH grants, scholarships for veteran's dependents, the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) program, Federal work-study programs, the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan program, and Federal Perkins Loans, among others programs;
- 5) Developing Institutions – Covering Hispanic-serving institutions, and promoting post-baccalaureate opportunities for Hispanic Americans;
- 6) International Education Programs – Covering International and foreign language studies, business and international education programs, and the Institute for International Public Policy;
- 7) Graduate and Postsecondary Improvement Programs – Covering graduate education programs, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), and the College Access Challenge Grant Program (CACG).
- 8) Additional Programs – Covering a number of programs that were added to the HEA by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 but have not yet been funded.

Last year, the House of Representatives approved five bipartisan higher education bills focused on assisting students in choosing the right college or university, making the financial aid process fairer and more transparent, and supporting higher education institutions that serve minority students. These bills were not taken up by the Senate, but will likely help to frame the discussion for reauthorization of the HEA in the new congress. More on these bills can be found [here](#). It should be noted that the last long-term HEA reauthorization in 2008 took five years to complete.

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