

ASPPH Policy & Advocacy

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Promise of a “Fair” Immigration Debate May Allow for a Budget Agreement in the Senate

The Federal government is currently operating under its [fourth](#) Continuing Resolution (CR) of fiscal year 2018, with this one expiring on February 8. With Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s (R-KY) [promise](#) of a “fair” debate on immigration reform and the DACA issue, Senate Democrats seem amenable to moving a standalone appropriations agreement and FY 2018 omnibus, if a deal raising the statutory spending caps can be reached. House Democrats are less supportive of such an agreement since they have no such promise from Speaker Ryan. In any case, a fifth CR will be needed next week. With the six-year reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) program enacted as part of the recent CR, there is discussion on the Hill that an extension of the Community Health Center reauthorization might be included in the next CR.

In addition to the CHIP reauthorization, the fourth CR also delayed three Affordable Care Act taxes. The medical device tax is on hold for another two years (2018 and 2019), the so called “Cadillac tax” is delayed for another two years (2020 and 2021) and the health insurance tax won’t be implemented in 2019 (but remains in effect in 2018). After the CR was enacted, the Joint Committee on Taxation issued an untimely [report](#) on the estimated cost of the move. The delay in the three ACA taxes under the stopgap will cost \$31.3 billion.

An [article](#) in *Politico* on January 25 asserts, “The Republican-led government shutdown in 2013 was billed as a fight over Obamacare. The latest disruption was triggered by Democrats’ demands on immigration. But lost in the headlines is the fact that the biggest common driver in both crises was Washington’s inability to come to grips with what it promised in the Budget Control Act of 2011.” The budget targets set by the law are viewed as unrealistic by both sides of the political spectrum, but for different reasons. The architect of the dysfunctional statute was Paul Ryan, now speaker of the House but then chair of the House Budget Committee.

The Office of Management and Budget [announced](#) on January 24 that Donald Trump’s fiscal year 2019 budget proposal will be delayed by a week and will be released on Monday, February 12. The State of the Union address is still scheduled

for January 30 at 9 pm ET. Congressman Joe Kennedy, III (D-MA) will deliver the official Democratic response to Trump's State of the Union address. Rep. Kennedy is the grandson of Bobby Kennedy and grand-nephew of President John F. Kennedy.

Administration Releases an Immigration Reform “Framework”

The Trump Administration on January 25 released a “[Framework](#) on Immigration Reform & Border Security.” It would, “Provide legal status for DACA recipients and other DACA-eligible illegal immigrants, adjusting the time-frame to encompass a total population of approximately 1.8 million individuals.” According to the White House, it would also provide a “10-12 year path to citizenship, with requirements for work, education and good moral character.” Aside from the DACA provision, the framework provisions would reduce legal immigration significantly. According to one [report](#), “...immigration leaders who’ve analyzed the proposal believe it could lead to reductions of 40-50% in legal immigration — the biggest reductions since the 1920s.”

The Trump proposal is a set of one-line ideas and proposals, with no legislative text or stated rationale. Some are aspirational statements that are political rallying cries rather than obtainable policy outcomes. For example, the Administration is demanding that any immigration reform deal, “Ensure [that] synthetic drugs (fentanyl) are prevented from entering the country.” No details on how that can be done are offered. According to the Administration, they will not be offering any proposed legislation, leaving that to Congress.

National Academies Release Long-Awaited Study on E-Cigarettes

A long-awaited congressionally mandated [study](#) of e-cigarettes was released on January 23 by the National Academies. According to the NAS summary, “Evidence suggests that while e-cigarettes are not without health risks, they are likely to be far less harmful than conventional cigarettes... They contain fewer numbers and lower levels of toxic substances than conventional cigarettes, and using e-cigarettes may help adults who smoke conventional cigarettes quit smoking. However, their long-term health effects are not yet clear. Among youth -- who use e-cigarettes at higher rates than adults do -- there is substantial evidence that e-cigarette use increases the risk of transitioning to smoking conventional cigarettes.”

CDC [reported](#) on January 18, “Overall, cigarette smoking among U.S. adults (aged ≥18 years) declined from 20.9 percent in 2005 to 15.5 percent in 2016. Yet, nearly

38 million American adults smoked cigarettes ('every day' or 'some days') in 2016." The CDC report also notes, "Cigarette smoking among U.S. adults has been reduced by more than half since 1964, yet remains the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. It kills more than 480,000 Americans each year. For every person who dies this year from smoking, there are over 30 Americans who continue to live with a smoking-related disease."

Also last week, a Food and Drug Administration Advisory Committee [rejected](#) a bid by Philip Morris International (PMI) to market its "heat-not-burn" tobacco product (iQOS) as cutting the risk of tobacco-related diseases.

A group of public health school deans last week released a [statement](#) stating that their schools will not accept funding from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, largely funding by Philip Morris International. The statement was organized by Ellen J. MacKenzie, PhD, MSc, Dean, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. ASPPH earlier released a [statement](#) on the Foundation.

GAO Issues Report on the Accreditation of Higher Education

The Government Accountability Office on January 23 released a new [report](#), "Higher Education: Expert Views of US Accreditation." Although the GAO did not make any recommendations, it did summarize the views of various experts offering suggestions on how the current higher education accreditation system might be restructured. The suggestions are grouped in four categories: 1) Modifying oversight roles and responsibilities; 2) Strengthening communication and transparency; 3) Using academic quality measures and expanding accreditation options; and 4) Changing the structure of the accreditation system.

Legislation [approved](#) by the House Education and Workforce Committee in December to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA) contains numerous statutory changes to the Department of Education's role in accreditation and its requirements of accreditors. This GAO report is likely to provide fodder for the HEA debates about accreditation going forward.

Azar Confirmed as HHS Secretary

The Senate confirmed Alex Azar as HHS secretary on January 24 by a vote of [55-43](#). He is scheduled to be sworn in on January 29. He succeeds Dr. Tom Price, who left the position on September 29 following controversy about his air travel expenditures. Mr. Azar, a lawyer and former deputy secretary of HHS, was President of the U.S. division of Eli Lilly and Company from 2012 to 2017. Peter

Urbanowicz, a former executive vice president at Tenet and HHS deputy general counsel at HHS, has been [appointed](#) Azar's chief of staff.

Last week, National Public Radio posted a [podcast](#) interview featuring *Politico's* Dan Diamond on the religious right's influence at the Department of Health and Human Service (HHS), and what to expect from newly confirmed HHS Secretary Alex Azar. He also discussed how he broke the story on the excessive use of private aircraft that eventually led to the resignation of Secretary Price.

In other personnel news:

- Tanisha Carino, PhD, has been [named](#) the new executive director of FasterCures, the Milken Institute center “devoted to saving lives and improving the medical research system.” She most recently was with GlaxoSmithKline. She succeeds Margaret Anderson, who stepped down last year to join Deloitte.
- Taylor Weyeneth, the 24-year-old former Trump campaign worker who rose rapidly to become the deputy chief of staff of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, has resigned. The resignation came after reports surfaced that he earlier was fired from a law firm for repeatedly not showing up to work. In addition, there were numerous inaccuracies found in his very short resume.

Other News

- The January 29 *Washington Post* features an perspective [essay](#) titled, “Higher education is headed for a supply and demand crisis.” The author writes, “Colleges better hope those kids were being honest because, a decade from now when they are applying to school, the outlook for enrollment in higher education is dire. The number of high school graduates nationwide is projected to remain relatively flat for the next several years before rising a bit in the middle of next decade. But between 2026 and 2031 — a period of graduating classes that includes both of my daughters — the ranks of high school graduates are expected to drop by 9 percent. Beyond the overall numbers shifting, high school graduating classes will become more diverse. Those classes will have fewer white students and more Hispanic students, according to demographers, and a greater range of academic abilities. Family incomes remain stagnant, so student financial need will increase. In other words, the decade ahead will be tumultuous for college enrollment.”
- Dr. Sue Desmond-Hellmann, currently CEO of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, wrote a [commentary](#) in last week's *Wall Street Journal* titled, “Be Skeptical of Those Who Treat Science as an Ideology.” The essay argues that

“Scientific knowledge is always provisional. The point is to produce evidence, not doctrine.”

- The National Academy of Sciences has [announced](#) that Dr. Paul Farmer, the co-founder and chief strategist of Partners in Health, will receive the NAS’s 2018 Public Welfare Medal, the Academy’s most prestigious award.
- The National Science Board (NSB), the presidentially-appointed advisory body to the National Science Foundation (NSF), has released the 2018 edition of its [Science and Engineering Indicators](#), a congressionally-mandated compendium of data "relevant to the scope, quality, and vitality of the science and engineering (S&E) enterprise." The report highlights the growing strength of China’s scientific investments.
- The Trust for America’s Health has issued a new [issue brief](#), “Racial Healing and Achieving Health Equity In the United States.”
- AcademyHealth, in collaboration with Northeastern University and the RWJ Foundation, has issued a new [publication](#), “Paying for Population Health: Case Studies on the Role of the Health System in Addressing Social Determinants of Health.” This report focuses on four case study sites including Burlington, VT; Muskegon, MI; Cincinnati, OH; and Greenville, SC. Each case study includes a detailed description of the intervention, outlines enabling factors, and provides considerations for the future.
- The Public Health Foundation has [posted](#) for comment “Priority Competencies for Population Health Professionals (Population Health Competencies)” that attempts to describe desired skills for population health professionals. PHF states that “the Population Health Competencies are primarily designed for non-clinical hospital, health system, public health, and healthcare professionals engaged in assessment of population health needs and development, delivery, and improvement of population health programs, services, and practices.” The current draft contains 33 competencies organized into five domains: community health assessment, community health improvement planning and action, community engagement and cultural awareness, systems thinking, and organizational planning and management. Comments are being accepted through the end of March.
- Drs. Tony Fauci and Robert Eisinger, both of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), wrote a perspective [article](#), posted on January 24 by the *New England Journal of Medicine*, recognizing the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for 15 years of implementing an innovative program to prevent, treat, and care for persons living with HIV and AIDS. The authors stress that continued support for the U.S. State Department program is necessary to ensure an effective global response to the

HIV pandemic and to set a precedent for addressing other infectious diseases worldwide.

- Results from the 2017 NACUBO-Commonfund Study of Endowments (NCSE) were released on January 24. The [report](#) shows that participating U.S. higher education endowments and affiliated foundations “achieved an average investment rate of return of 12.2 percent (net of fees) for FY17 (July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017). This is a sharp reversal from last year’s -1.9 percent average one-year return. Despite this year’s gain, endowment results have generally been on the decline for much of the past decade. As a result, the annualized 10-year average return fell to 4.6 percent from last year’s 5.0 percent.” The growth in investments may lead additional institutions to be subject to the 1.4 percent excise tax on endowments included in the December tax bill.

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Tony Mazzaschi | *Senior Director, Policy and Research*

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) | www.aspph.org

1900 M Street NW, Suite 710 | Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 202-296-1099, ext. 132 | Email: tmazzaschi@aspph.org

