GOP Elects Leadership; President-Elect Trump Names Cabinet

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

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Washington Update

Senate Leadership

On Wednesday, November 13, Senator John Thune (SD) emerged as the winner of the GOP leadership race and is poised to become the next Senate majority leader. As Congress gets back to work, Thune has cautioned that the procedural limits of the reconciliation process will likely restrict its use more than some House Republicans anticipate, urging them to manage their expectations.

House Budget Chair Jodey Arrington (TX) aims to use both of next year's reconciliation opportunities to target mandatory spending, including health care, welfare, and federal employee benefits. While cuts to Medicare and Social Security are off the table, Arrington sees reconciliation as a critical tool for addressing other large spending areas.

As for the FY25 funding deal, House Appropriations Chair Tom Cole (OK) said it's too soon to predict whether Congress will meet the December 20 deadline. He emphasized the goal of reaching a deal as quickly as possible but indicated a willingness to follow the president's and leadership's guidance on timing.

Trump Cabinet

President-elect Donald Trump continues to fill top positions in his cabinet, and while he has yet to name his choice for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the appointment will likely be less controversial than other picks he has made. Even if Trump nominated a pro-business figure, which could alienate working-class voters and unions he made efforts to appeal to throughout the campaign, Senate Republicans — already facing more controversial nominees for other cabinet posts — would likely provide a steady path to confirmation.

Among potential candidates being discussed are current mayor of Pinehurst, North Carolina, Patrick Pizzella, who served at DOL as deputy labor secretary and acting labor secretary during Trump's first term; former Equal Employment Opportunity Commissioner Keigh Sonderling, who would be Trump's least controversial choice due to his work advising employers how to avoid discrimination through artificial intelligence during his time at the agency; Andrew Puzder, who was Trump's pick for Labor Secretary during his first term but his nomination was derailed by spousal abuse allegations; and Congressman Brandon Williams (NY), who recently lost his re-election bid to Democratic state Senator John Mannian and currently serves on the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

DOL Overtime Rule

On Friday, November 15, U.S. District Judge Sean Jordan blocked the Biden Administration's overtime rule, which would have expanded access to overtime pay to millions more salaried workers across the country. In his ruling, Judge Jordan determined that the Department of Labor's (DOL's) regulation was based on workers' salary levels, rather than the "executive, administrative, and professional" exemptions outlined in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The rule would have required employers to pay overtime to salaried workers who make less than $58,656 — an increase from the current level of $43,888. Now, the previous threshold of $35,568 — which was set in 2019 under the first Trump administration — could go back into effect. The DOL is now reviewing the decision with the Department of Justice to determine next steps.

Senate HELP Committee

Senator Rand Paul (KY) has chosen to chair the Senate Homeland Security Committee over the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, allowing Senator Bill Cassidy (LA) to lead the HELP panel, where he currently serves as ranking member. Cassidy expressed his eagerness to lead the committee, emphasizing his commitment to advancing a "Pro-America agenda" and delivering solutions for the nation. Paul, who had

the seniority to choose between the two committees, selected Homeland Security to focus on investigating the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic.

While Cassidy has a strong health policy background, he has also led GOP opposition to Biden's labor regulations, including blocking the NLRB's joint-employer rule in April. Cassidy has indicated a willingness to work with Democrats on workforce legislation, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This shift may benefit organized labor, as Cassidy is less likely to push anti-union policies compared to Paul, who supports the National Right to Work Act, which would undermine unionization provisions in federal labor laws. At times, Cassidy has been critical of Committee Chair Bernie Sanders' (VT) approach as chair. It's unclear whether Sanders will remain a ranking member of HELP in the next Congress.

Meanwhile, on Thursday, November 14, Cassidy and Senator Susan Collins (ME) sent a letter to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) regarding revisions to employment data under the Biden administration. BLS adjusted August job numbers, revealing a shortfall of nearly 800,000 jobs compared to earlier reports, angering lawmakers.

Click here to access the letter.

FAFSA Deadline Act

On Friday, November 15, with overwhelming bipartisan support, the House of Representatives passed the FAFSA Deadline Act (HR 8932) on a vote of 381 to 1. Education and Workforce Committee Chairwoman Virginia Foxx (NC) and Committee Ranking Member Bobby Scott (VA) both praised the House for passage of the legislation. The bill, sponsored by Congresswoman Erin Houchin (IN), requires the FAFSA to be released and fully operational by October 1 each year, providing clarity for students, families, and schools. Currently, the Education Department has the flexibility to delay the FAFSA release until January 1, which tends to lead to confusion and disruption. By setting a hard deadline, the bill aims to prevent future delays and ensure timely access to financial aid. Earlier this year, Foxx and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Ranking Member Bill Cassidy (LA) criticized the Biden administration for blocking a GAO investigation into its failure to implement the new FAFSA program.

Initial Jobless Claims

In the week ending November 9, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 217,000, a decrease of 4,000 from the previous week's unrevised level of 221,000. The 4-week moving average was 221,000, a decrease of 6,250 from the previous week's unrevised average of 227,250. The advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 1.2 percent for the week ending November 2, unchanged from the previous week's unrevised rate.

[Click here](#) to access the report.

New from DOL/ETA

Growing and Diversifying the STEM/STEAM Educator Workforce Through Registered Apprenticeship

November 8 is National STEM & STEAM Day. This day provides an opportunity to recognize the increasing power Registered Apprenticeship programs have in growing and diversifying the STEM/STEAM educator workforce—which is critical for the overall success and future of our workforce in science, technology, engineering, arts and math. According to recent data, 1 in 8 teaching positions nationally are unfilled or filled by teachers not fully certified for their assignments. The U.S. Department of Education's Raise the Bar Initiative highlights how the national educator shortage is particularly acute in STEM fields: 37 states projected a shortage of qualified teachers in both math and science. We also know that the current STEM educator workforce does not reflect the diversity of their classrooms.

[Click here](#) to read the full article.

Revamping Unemployment Insurance, One State at a Time

The pandemic exposed long-standing problems in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system that hit disadvantaged communities the hardest. The Department of Labor is committed to addressing these flaws and breaking down barriers that stop workers from getting help when they need it most. President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) secured $1 billion to help states enhance their unemployment infrastructure. On October 24, I traveled with Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training José Javier Rodríguez in Wisconsin to see how the Badger State is using $32 million of ARPA funds to improve customer experience and access to benefits. While we were there, our Director of UI Modernization Andy Stettner facilitated a discussion with Assistant Secretary Rodriguez, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Secretary Amy Pechacek and representatives from business and labor. The discussion celebrated progress modernizing unemployment insurance in Wisconsin since the pandemic and allowed us to learn critical issues the state continues to address.

Secretary Pechacek highlighted Wisconsin's record job numbers and employment rates over the past four years. The state is active in UI modernization and was one of the first to volunteer to have a group of experts, called Tiger Teams, help identify new UI strategies.

[Click here](#) to read the full press release.

Start Making Better, Faster Hiring Decisions in Under 15 Minutes

The U.S. Department of Labor launched the Good Jobs Initiative to make it easier to get workers into good jobs that help them get ahead. Not just for the sake of workers, but employers too. Adopting the Goods Jobs Principles is good for employers because the working conditions they provide lead to increased productivity and savings from lower turnover. But hiring can be hard, with many potholes and barriers that prevent employers from reaching excellent talent who can fill their good jobs.

That is why we and the Department of Commerce worked with dozens of experts—from corporate thinkers to labor leaders—to build the Good Jobs Initiative Skills-First Hiring Starter Kit. Announced today at the White House, this user-friendly guide tells readers in plain and concrete terms what skills-first hiring is and how they can do it well. It also shares tools that can reduce the organizational lift of moving from traditional hiring to skills-first hiring.

You may have heard about skills-first hiring in the news. Also known as "skills-based hiring," this strategy, mentioned in our Good Jobs Principles, means hiring or promoting around skills, knowledge, and abilities that workers can show they actually have—no matter how workers got those skills. Skills-first hiring removes barriers to good, family-sustaining jobs for workers who have ample talent but cannot reach good jobs because of hiring processes that require that they show they got their skills a certain way.

Click here to read the full article.

WDC in the News

Governor Hobbs Announces New Workforce Development Program Prioritizing Semiconductor Manufacturing

On Thursday, November 14, Governor Katie Hobbs announced a new workforce development program Thursday morning, as part of the Future48 Workforce Accelerators which began in 2023. This new program, announced by the state and the Maricopa Community Colleges, will provide a customized curriculum for students looking to gain firsthand experience in semiconductor manufacturing, an industry which has boomed in the U.S. in recent years. MCC Governing Board President Susan Bitter Smith said this is a result of the Biden administration's CHIPS Act.

Click here to read the full article.

EVs Aren't Going Away. Here's How Michigan is Preparing Its Workforce

A century after Michigan fueled the American auto industry, state officials are focused on shoring up college curriculums to ensure a workforce is prepared for the evolution of combustion engine vehicles to those powered by batteries. Though the industry's transition to electric vehicles is expected to meet resistance under President-elect Donald Trump, and debate rages over when — or whether — EVs will dominate the nation's roads, experts said educational institutions still need to respond to the industry's needs and prepare students with those skills. EVs are here to stay, industry and higher education officials said, and that's why Michigan needs to play the long game to hold on to its historic reputation in the global auto market.

Click here to read the full article.

The Real Deal: Unpacking Quality for Nondegree Credentials

In postsecondary education and training, quality is where rubber meets road. Low-quality programs can have harmful effects on students, employers, providers, and society at large. Such programs lead students to drop out or fail to get jobs for which their credentials should prepare them, sometimes going deeply into debt with no payoff. Employers may discover their new hires are less prepared than expected. Providers may see declining enrollment as students seek other options.

As the ecosystem of nondegree credentials—including certificates, certifications, licenses, microcredentials, and skill badges—takes center stage in discussions about preparing 21st century workers for a changing labor market, an uncomfortable realization is dawning among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers: We don't know enough about the quality of nondegree credentials.

Click here to read the full article.

'AI is more than just ChatGPT': Preparing students to use AI responsibly in the workforce

A favorite puzzle of philosophers is the trolley problem. You can pull a lever and divert a runaway trolley just in time to avoid killing five people — but one person would die on the new track. Do you pull the lever? On a sunny September morning in a third-floor classroom on the Providence campus of Rhode Island College (RIC), small groups of students debated a tweaked trolley problem in which a robot is at the switch. They've all read sci-fi author Isaac Asimov's allegorical "three laws of robotics," which deemed it forbidden for robots to hurt humans. What's a bot to do, when a bloody outcome seems unavoidable?

Cheteyan encountered the trolley problem in the course "Application and Impact of AI," taught by Associate Professor Leonardo Pinheiro. It's one of two courses integrating ethical

detective work in RIC's new AI curriculum, which launched in September. The bachelor's of science program is the first such AI-focused undergraduate degree at a Rhode Island state school. It's meant to prepare students for a workforce in which AI is no longer novel, said Tim Henry, the associate professor who leads the new AI program. That means educating students on not only how to build artificial intelligence, but how to do it responsibly.

Click here to read the full article.

Reports & Articles

New from the White House

Fact Sheet: White House Hosts "Classroom to Career" Summit, Celebrates Successful Efforts to Expand High-Quality Career Pathways and Workforce Development Programs in Every Community

On Wednesday, November 13, Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden welcomed approximately 200 education and workforce leaders to the White House for the Biden-Harris Administration's "Classroom to Career" Summit. The Administration's Investing in America agenda is creating millions of good-paying jobs—many of which do not require a four-year college degree—and its investments will continue to drive job creation for years to come. The Summit highlighted record progress to expand career pathways to these good-paying jobs in infrastructure, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and more.

The Summit brought together Cabinet members and other senior Administration officials, state and local elected officials, community college presidents, K-12 leaders, unions, workforce development leaders from the nine White House Workforce Hubs and other communities across the country, business leaders, representatives of philanthropic organizations, and students.

Click here to read the full press release.

New from U.S. Department of Commerce

U.S. Department of Commerce Announces 12,000 American Workers Placed into Jobs Through Biden-Harris Administration's Good Jobs Challenge

On Wednesday, November 13, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) announced more than 12,000 American workers have been trained and placed into jobs through the Good Jobs Challenge. The program, initially

funded by the Biden-Harris Administration's American Rescue Plan, is investing a historic $500 million into high-quality, locally-led workforce training programs across the country. The Good Jobs Challenge (GJC) is the first large-scale worker training program in the history of the Department of Commerce.

The Good Jobs Challenge is designed to build and strengthen workforce systems and industry-led partnerships, providing new opportunities and training for America's workforce to develop in-demand skills that meet the needs of today's employers and lead to good-paying jobs. The program, which is concluding its second year of implementation, initially awarded $500 million to 32 grantees to advance job training in a wide range of sectors, including agriculture and food production, energy and resilience, healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology.

Click here to read the full press release.

New from NCLS

Labor Gaps as Opportunities: How Workforce Shortages Can Impact Employment for People with Disabilities

The pandemic accelerated technological advances and demographic shifts in society, significantly impacting the employment landscape. Changes in the style and structure of work, including remote work—combined with the renewed worker focus on personal priorities—have created challenges and opportunities for many industries seeking to fill open positions. The resulting labor shortages present opportunities for people with disabilities seeking employment. Both public sector and state-based, private sector incentives for employers who want to hire workers with disabilities can increase employment opportunities for disabled individuals.

State government is one of many sectors struggling with labor shortages. To address this issue, state and local policymakers have pursued creative strategies to recruit, promote, hire and retain state government employees, including those from historically underemployed groups. One approach seeks to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the labor force, often through the adoption of State as a Model Employer policies. SAME policies are formal initiatives by state governments to promote inclusive employment practices for disabled people.

Click here to read the full article.

New from National Governors Association

Aligning the Workforce System and Economic Growth: Best Practices from State WIOA Planning

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires Governors to submit strategic and operational plans to the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) on a 4-year planning cycle. For program years (PY) 2024–2027, Governors submitted their WIOA State Plans to USDOL on March 4, 2024. In the run-up to WIOA State Plan Submission, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and USDOL partnered to support states as they developed their 2024 WIOA State Plans.

In December 2023, the NGA Center released a publication to support states as they set the strategic direction for implementation of these new laws through their State WIOA Plan. The five-part publication outlines opportunities within the Strategic Planning Elements of State WIOA Plans for Governors and state workforce development boards to steer new investments from IIJA, CHIPS, and IRA. It also features analysis of each of the three new federal programs and the corresponding opportunities for state workforce systems to play a key role in implementation.

Click here to read the full press release.

Fast Fact

A new report from the Rutgers University Education & Employment Research Center highlights significant gaps in data on noncredit workforce programs at community colleges, despite growing state funding. Researchers analyzed programs in Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, South Carolina, and Tennessee, finding that only two states tracked completion data, and only Maryland collected post-program wage data.

THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS
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