2014 Community College National Legislative Summit

The 2014 Community College National Legislative Summit was held in Washington, D.C., February 11th through February 13th. More than 1,000 community college trustees, presidents, students, and institutional leaders were in our nation’s Capital to advocate for their institutions and the community college federal legislative priorities. Those priorities covered a range of issues but focused primarily on maintaining the Pell Grant program, reauthorizing the Higher Education Act and the Workforce Investment Act, and helping community colleges serve Veteran students. Participating in the summit and a series of meetings on Capitol Hill with members of California’s Congressional delegation was Board of Governors chair, Dr. Manuel Baca, vice chair, Geoffrey Baum, board member Deborah Malumed, and Chancellor Brice Harris.

Task Force on Government Regulation of Higher Education

The Task Force on Government Regulation of Higher Education kicked off its work at a February 12th meeting held at the American Council on Education (ACE) headquarters in Washington, DC. The group, which includes Chancellor Harris, is charged with: (1) making specific recommendations regarding ways in which requirements administered by the Department of Education might be streamlined or eliminated; (2) quantifying the impact of all federal regulatory requirements impacting colleges; and (3) recommending ways in which the costs and benefits of future regulatory activity can be accurately assessed. The Task Force was created by a bipartisan group of Senators, led by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD). Joining the effort are Senators Richard Burr (R-NC) and Michael Bennet (D-CO). Co-chaired by Nicholas Zeppos, chancellor of Vanderbilt University, and William Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland, the task force is comprised of 16 members drawn from all sectors of higher education.

White House Skills Summit

The White House Skills Summit that was postponed from December of last year was held on January 16th with national education leaders, including Chancellor Harris. The Summit is part of the administration's national agenda to increase the number of citizens who earn college credentials, enabling them to more fully participate in the current and emerging job market. The day included remarks from the President, First Lady, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, panels, and a lunch-time breakout discussion. The purpose of this Summit is to ensure that disadvantaged students are being reached early enough to succeed in college and career. The Summit compliments First Lady Michelle Obama’s policy role in higher education, which includes an emphasis on low income students from underrepresented communities, with remediation and counseling being part of the plan to increase student success. The First Lady is also interested in a phenomenon known as “undermatching”, when high-achieving low-income students don’t apply to the competitive colleges where they would likely be accepted.
President Obama’s College Affordability Proposals

One of the main pieces of the Obama Administration’s higher education plans is the development of a new college ratings system. The details are currently being refined with the Department of Education. The ratings will assess institutions and advance institutional accountability while also enhancing consumer useful information. Using data such as:

- Access, such as percentage of students receiving Pell grants;
- Affordability, such as average tuition, scholarships, and loan debt; and
- Outcomes, such as graduation and transfer rates, graduate earnings, and advanced degrees of college graduates.

The Obama Administration is in the process of gathering input from stakeholders across the country. They have posted Requests for Information in the Federal Register, as well held public forums.

Congressional Community Colleges Bills of Interest

H.R. 357: GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2013
This bipartisan legislation introduced by Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL), Chairman of the House Veterans Committee, and ranking member Representative Mike Michaud (D-ME), would require courses of education provided by public institutions of higher education that are approved for purposes of the educational assistance programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to charge veterans tuition and fees at the in-state tuition rate. This bill was approved by the House on a 390-0 vote and sent to the Senate where it was referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans. The Senate has an identical version of this bill, S. 257 by Senator John Boozman (R-AR) which is currently being heard in the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.

H.R. 359: CAMPUS Safety Act of 2013
This bill, introduced by Representative Robert Scott (D-VA) would establish and operate a National Center for Campus Public Safety. The Center would: (1) provide quality education and training for public safety personnel of institutions of higher education and their collaborative partners, including campus mental health agencies; (2) foster quality research to strengthen the safety and security of institutions of higher education; and (3) serve as a clearinghouse for the identification and dissemination of information, policies, protocols, procedures, and best practices relevant to campus public safety, including off-campus housing safety, the prevention of violence against persons and property, and emergency response and evacuation procedures. This bill is in the House Judiciary Committee and was referred to Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigation.

H.R. 803: The Support Knowledge and Investing in Lifelong Skills Act (SKILLS Act)
H.R. 803, also known as the SKILLS Act relates to statewide and local workforce investment systems and activities, identification of eligible training services providers, and use of funds for employment and training activities. As for community colleges, this bill would facilitate greater collaboration with community colleges by allowing states to determine the standards
required for eligible training providers and allows local boards to contract with community colleges directly to provide training to large groups of participants instead of on an individual basis. H.R. 803 would also consolidate 35 existing streams of funding into a single Workforce Investment Fund. This Republican bill, introduced by Representative Virginia Foxx (R-NC), passed out of the House Education and Workforce Committee with a 23-0 vote. The Democrats left the hearing early in protest from not being included in the drafting of the bill, so none of the Democrats voted. This bill passed on the House floor with a 226-191 vote and is now in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

H.R. 1949: Improving Postsecondary Education Data for Students Act
This bill, sponsored by Representative Luke Messer (R-IN) passed out of the House and was referred to the Senate on May 23, 2013. It would direct the Secretary of Education to convene the Advisory Committee on Improving Postsecondary Education Data to conduct a study on improvements to postsecondary education transparency. Specifically, the task force will explore factors that students and families have, want, and need when researching their postsecondary education options. This bill is being considered in the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

H.R. 2637: the Supporting Academic Freedom Through Regulatory Relief Act
On July 24, 2013 H.R. 2637 by Representative Virginia Foxx (R-NC) was amended in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. This bill repeals: 1) the gainful employment regulation; 2) the state authorization regulation, which forces states to follow federal requirements when deciding whether to grant an institution permission to operate within the state; and 3) the credit hour regulation, which establishes a federal definition of a credit hour and increases the government’s control over institutions’ academic affairs. In addition, the bill amends the incentive compensation regulation to ensure third-party service providers are allowed to enter into tuition sharing agreements with nonprofit colleges and universities to aid in the development of distance education platforms. It would also prohibit the Department of Education from issuing related regulations until after Congress reauthorizes the Higher Education Act. This bill was amended in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on September 10, 2013, and was placed on the House Union Calendar.

S. 3: Strengthen our Schools and Students Act
Introduced on January 22, 2013, by Senator Harry Reid (D-NV), Senate Bill 3 would build on recent efforts to continue to make higher education more affordable and to improve access and success for all students. It would also provide all teachers with the support they need to ensure student success, including the creation of a new national Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Master Teacher Corps to recognize and help retain STEM teachers and strengthen STEM education in public schools in the United States. This bill is in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

S. 216: Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act of 2013
Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) introduced Senate Bill 216 on February 4, 2013, which would prevent harassment at institutions of higher education. It would authorize the Secretary of Education to award grants, on a competitive basis, to eligible entities to enable them to carry out authorized activities such as counseling or redress services to students who have suffered from harassment or students who have been accused of subjecting other students to such
harassment; or to educate or train students, faculty, or staff of institutions of higher education about ways to prevent harassment or ways to address such harassment if it occurs. This bill is waiting to be heard in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. The House version of this bill is H.R. 482 and is currently in the House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training.

S. 1356: The Workforce Investment Act of 2013
This bipartisan bill, introduced by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA) on July 31, 2013, is the Senate’s version of reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act. The bill focuses on effective use of real-world data, performance indicators, and stringent assessments and evaluations to determine the impact of workforce investments. It also restructures state and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) by making state WIB seats optional and unlike the House’s SKILLS Act (H.R. 803) it would keep the community colleges seat on the boards. The Senate bill also closely aligns workforce systems with regional economic development and labor markets. In doing so, it would reauthorize the Community Based Job Training Grants program, which would provide competitive grants to support community college partnerships that train individuals in high-demand industry sectors and occupation. S. 1356 was approved by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on November 10th and will next be up for a vote on the Senate floor.

S. 1990: Eligibility for Postsecondary Education Benefits
On February 5th, Senator David Vitter (R-Louisiana) introduced S. 1990. This bill would prohibit states from offering in state tuition to undocumented immigrants unless they offer in-state tuition to all Americans. The author contends that 15 states have exploited a loophole in federal immigration policy to extend in state tuition to undocumented immigrants. States are currently prohibited from granting postsecondary education benefits to undocumented immigrants on the basis of residency. However, through the use of a different criteria, such as graduation from an instate high school (similar to California’s AB 540), states have been granting in state tuition regardless of immigration status. If enacted, this bill would force states to either grant in state tuition to Americans from every U.S. state or deny in state tuition to undocumented immigrants that are currently considered residents.