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STATEMENTS ON PRESIDENT BUSH

President Trump issued a [statement](#) on the passing of President George H. W. Bush:

“Melania and I join with a grieving nation to mourn the loss of former President George H. W. Bush, who passed away last night [November 30]. Through his essential authenticity, disarming wit, and unwavering commitment to faith, family, and country, President Bush inspired generations of his fellow Americans to public service -- to be, in his words, ‘a thousand points of light’ illuminating the greatness, hope, and opportunity of America to the world. President Bush always found a way to set the bar higher. As a young man, he captained the Yale baseball team and served as the youngest aviator in the U.S. Navy during the Second World War. Later in life, he rose to the pinnacle of American politics as a Congressman from Texas, envoy to China, Director of Central Intelligence, Vice President for eight years to President Ronald Reagan, and, finally, President of the United States. With sound judgement, common sense, and unflappable leadership, President Bush guided our nation, and the world, to a peaceful and victorious conclusion of the Cold War. As President, he set the stage for the decades of prosperity that have followed. Through all that he accomplished, he remained humble, following the quiet call to service that gave him a clear sense of direction. Along with his full life of service to the country, we will remember President Bush for his devotion to family -- especially the love of his life, Barbara. His example lives on and will continue to stir future Americans to pursue a greater cause....”

The President also issued a [proclamation](#), sent a [message to Congress](#), and signed an [Executive Order](#) closing federal executive agencies on December 5 (the day of the state funeral).

Secretary DeVos issued her own [statement](#) mourning the loss of President Bush:

“My heart and prayers are with the Bush family at this time of great loss. George H. W. Bush’s gentle approach called us to the greater good, and his strong example over the years inspired many, me among them, to enter public service. Perhaps never has a citizen given his life to service of country in a more noble and unassuming way than he did. He first answered the call of duty in the wake of Pearl Harbor, and America benefitted from his service for the eight remarkable decades that followed. Despite reaching our nation’s highest office, his story was never of himself. He’d tell you of his love for Bar, how proud he was of his children, and how enamored he was by his grandchildren, because George H. W. Bush cared about people more than anything else. His dedication to others and his love for country are why he and his family worked so tirelessly to improve educational opportunities, especially expanding the power of literacy, for all. As we mourn, we take comfort in knowing that America now has a 1,001st point of light shining down from the Heavens on us....”

HURRICANE AREA VISIT

On November 26, the Secretary traveled to Panama City, Florida, with U.S. Congressman Neal Dunn. They toured Cedar Grove Elementary School, which has absorbed students from Hurricane Michael-damaged Springfield Elementary School. They also participated in a roundtable discussion hosted by Bay District Schools Superintendent Bill Husfelt at Rutherford High School, which has absorbed students from Everitt Middle School. “I give a lot of credit to the community for coming together and figuring out a solution to meet students’ needs immediately,” the Secretary emphasized. “We are going to continue to work closely with the state and the [school] district...to help ensure whatever needs to be done, we will be partners...to the fullest extent possible” (tweets [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), and [8](#)).

CRISIS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

On November 27, in [remarks](#) at the Department’s annual Federal Student Aid (FSA) Training Conference in Atlanta, the Secretary warned America’s students and taxpayers of “a crisis in higher education.” She called the nation’s higher education system “the envy of the world” but declared, if significant policy changes are not made to the way student aid is distributed and administered, “the program on which so many students rely will be in serious jeopardy.” Indeed, FSA holds nearly \$1.5 trillion in outstanding federal loans (more than \$10,000 for each and every American taxpayer); only 24% of borrowers are currently paying down both principal and interest; and 43% of all federal loans are considered “in distress” ([press release](#) and [blog post](#)).

In response, the Secretary laid out four core principles from which decision-makers can start when taking action to address the problem:

“First, people -- human capital -- are our greatest national resource. It’s in our nation’s interest to support individual students’ interests...their potential, their creativity, their destiny. Every person should have the opportunity to pursue the education that’s right for them. Supporting and encouraging a multitude of pathways makes common sense.

“Second, innovation must be unleashed. If it is, it will advance opportunity, efficiency, and results in education as it has in every other industry.

“Third, better, more accessible information is necessary for policymakers, for students, for parents, and for taxpayers.

“And finally, nothing is free. Someone, somewhere ultimately pays the bills.”

In her remarks, the Secretary also highlighted the [myStudentAid](#) mobile application: “There were plenty of folks who declared it could not be done. They said the Department was ‘overpromising what it could deliver....’ As you know, the myStudentAid app launched exactly on schedule. And it’s already making an impact. It has been downloaded nearly 250,000 times, and more than 375,000 [Free Applications for Federal Student Aid] (FAFSAs®) have been submitted on a mobile device! I’ve met with a number of students across the country, some of whom have given great feedback for tweaks and improvements, and others who’ve shared how happy they are to have this tool at their fingertips.... In the near future, a student will be able to see how much he or she owes at any moment in time, what repayment options are available, and how those options will impact the total amount owed over time.”

Moreover, she provided an update on the Department’s evolution to the Next Generation Processing and Servicing Environment (NextGen): “Our major goal of the NextGen initiative is to facilitate a partnership with you to improve student financial literacy. Imagine how students would benefit if they could easily and continually plan and budget for their education, if they could seamlessly access personalized insights about the outcomes of the program they are considering or in which they are enrolled. Think about the power of having hard numbers, and how having that information could help a student make more informed -- and better -- decisions. We are working to bring new tools like these online soon, so that...we can all fulfill our charge to

help students earn their degrees and be positioned to succeed when they enter repayment.”

U.S.-SWISS APPRENTICESHIPS

This week, the Secretaries of Education, Labor, and Commerce and Senior Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump joined the Swiss government in signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on apprenticeships. This MOU builds upon the ongoing collaboration between the countries to encourage businesses and other stakeholders to promote the value of apprenticeship programs and develop effective strategies to increase awareness of and access to work-based learning. This year, Secretary DeVos traveled to Switzerland, where two-thirds of students pursue their education through one of 250 types of government-recognized apprenticeships (tweets [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#) and [blog post](#) with 15 fast facts about the Swiss Apprenticeship Program).

STEM STRATEGIC PLAN

Also this week, President Trump released a plan to strengthen science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. The five-year [strategic plan](#) seeks to ensure that all Americans have access to quality STEM education and safeguard America’s place as a global leader in innovation and employment. The Administration’s goals include building a strong foundation of STEM literacy, increasing diversity in STEM careers, and preparing the STEM workforce of the future. To achieve the goals, the plan lays out key pathways: developing and enriching strategic STEM partnerships, engaging students where disciplines converge, and advancing computational thinking as a critical skill for America’s workforce. The plan was collaboratively developed by the National Science and Technology Council Committee on STEM Education and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy ([fact sheet](#) and [blog post](#)).

ODDS AND ENDS

- The Department’s [proposed Title IX regulation](#) on improving schools’ response to sexual harassment and assault was [published in the *Federal Register*](#) on November 29, making the deadline for public comment January 28, 2019. Also, Secretary DeVos penned an [op-ed on the rule](#), published in the *Washington Post*. “Some may mischaracterize our proposals as tilting the scales of justice,” she said, “but we believe they simply balance them. Our proposed framework supports survivors while safeguarding due process, helping make Title IX protections against sex discrimination a reality for all students.”
- The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee approved the nomination of [Robert King](#) to be the Department’s Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education, advancing him for consideration by the full Senate.
- Don’t miss these recent Homeroom blog pots: “[#RethinkSchool: Struggling Student Discovers Path through Colorado Apprenticeship Program](#),” “[How Computer Science Encourages Girls to Pursue STEM Careers](#),” “[Exemplary Student Art and Writing Honored at U.S. Department of Education](#),” “[#RethinkSchool: iLEAD Academy Students Take the Lead in Northern Kentucky](#),” “[The 5 Most Helpful Federal Student Aid Blog Posts](#),” and “[ED’s Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives Hosts Opioid Prevention Listening Session](#).”
- The Department’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is rethinking [Results Drive Accountability](#) (RDA) to ensure it is in the best position to raise expectations and improve early childhood and educational outcomes for individuals with disabilities, their families, their communities, and the nation. Specifically, OSEP is interested in feedback about what is working and what should change with the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report, the State Systemic Improvement Plan, annual determinations under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), and the system of differentiated monitoring and support. Any input may be submitted to RethinkRDA@ed.gov through December 21.
- The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released *First Look* reports with useful data on [Graduation Rates for Selected Cohorts, 2009-14](#); [Outcome Measures for Cohort Year 2009-10](#); [Student Financial Aid in Postsecondary Institutions, Academic Year 2016-17](#); and [Admissions in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2017](#) and [state-level revenues and expenditures for elementary and secondary education in](#)

QUOTE TO NOTE

“The federal government must become a more responsible lender. Congress must recognize and be honest about the unmistakable implications of its favored programs on students, on taxpayers, and on rising costs. Schools must become honest about their individual roles in the cost-value proposition. Every school should focus on helping each student find the right pathway. They should help students graduate with high-quality career prospects and with low debt. Students must equip themselves to be responsible consumers of education with a serious commitment to their own success. They need to have the best possible tools, data, advice, and support. Then, they need to understand the implications of their decisions. Each of us has a contribution to make and a role to play in resolving our present crisis in higher education.”

-- Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (11/27/18), in [remarks](#) at FSA’s Training Conference in Atlanta

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nominations for the 2018-19 [Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching](#) are now open. Anyone may nominate exceptional STEM teachers teaching grades 7-12. (Awards alternate between elementary and secondary teachers.) Teachers may also self-nominate. The President bestows up to 108 awards each year. Since the program’s inception, over 4,800 teachers have been recognized for their contributions in the classroom and to their profession. (Note: The deadline for nominations is March 1, 2019.)

On December 10, from 3:15 to 3:45 p.m. Eastern Time, National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Dr. Francis Collins will be taking [live questions](#) from middle school students on becoming a scientist.

On December 12, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) will host a [webinar](#) on how its resources can support use of high-quality research evidence in decision-making. The webinar will cover: the need for high-quality research that has been vetted by experts; an overview of the WWC resources and how different WWC evidence levels are designated; strategies that administrators can use to effectively identify and select relevant sources within the WWC; and recommendations for sharing relevant research and additional WWC resources with teachers and other staff in easily understandable ways. This webinar is intended for district-level administrators, school principals, and other practitioners.

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