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CU Federal Relations Monthly Update - 12.19.25 [1]

December 19, 2025 by Riley Black [2]

FY26 Appropriations Update

Work on appropriations has slowed after the passage of an initial Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) appropriations minibus as part of the congressional deal to reopen the government [3] earlier this year. Senate Republican leadership is aiming to advance a second appropriations minibus funding the departments of Defense; Education; Commerce; Labor; Health and Human Services; Justice; Transportation; Interior; and Housing and Urban Development. CU Federal Relations has engaged with Colorado lawmakers in support of university priorities as the House and Senate have sought to reconcile their respective versions of the bills.

The Senate did not pass additional appropriations legislation before the end of the year, and will aim to advance funding bills next month, reports [4] *POLITICO*. Government funding for agencies not included in the initial minibus expires on Jan. 30.

NDAA Update

The *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026* [5] (NDAA) was signed into law by the president on Dec. 18. The House passed the NDAA on Dec. 10 by a 312-112 vote, and the Senate passed the NDAA on Dec. 17 by a 77-20 vote.

Compromise text included text prohibiting the Secretary of War from modifying or changing indirect cost rates (ICR) for Department of War (DOW) grants unless a compromise model is decided upon with the extramural research community. The DOW is now the second agency to prohibit set ICR rates (after the National Institutes of Health) and the first to prohibit changes until a compromise model is agreed upon. Similar language has been proposed in appropriations language for the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy. However, final versions of those appropriation bills have not been released yet.

The enacted legislation omits the *SAFE Research Act*, a provision included in the House-passed draft, which would have prohibited all federal agencies from funding researchers who collaborate with “hostile foreign entities” or “foreign-adversary-controlled entities.” The Association of American Universities (AAU) and Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) issued a letter [6] on Oct. 15 urging lawmakers not to include the SAFE Research Act in the NDAA provision. The final NDAA also excluded provisions on post-employment restrictions, conflicting research security requirements, and civil rights enforcement that AAU and APLU described as concerning in a Nov. 3 letter [7] to committee leaders.

Education Negotiated Rulemaking Update

The U.S. Department of Education is conducting negotiated rulemaking regarding student loan changes required in H.R.1 [8], the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act*. The Reimagining and Improving Student Education (RISE [9]) Committee reached consensus [10] Nov. 6 on the entire

package of federal student loan-related changes. The changes included the elimination of Grad PLUS loans, capping Parent PLUS loans, creating a new Repayment Assistance Plan, and restricting graduate students to $20,500 annually ($100,000 aggregate limit) in federal loans and $50,000 annually ($200,000 aggregate) for professional students. The negotiators agreed to 17 regulatory provisions, including the definition of which degrees will be classified as professional degrees. The Department will publish the regulatory language in the Federal Register for public comment, which is expected in early 2026. Final rules will be published thereafter and take effect in July 2026.

Reps. Jason Crow and Brittany Pettersen joined a bipartisan letter [11] on Dec. 12 sent to ED regarding concerns of the omission in post-baccalaureate nursing degrees in the definition of professional degrees. Additional legislative efforts are being discussed to consider more degree areas. Higher education associations joined an American Council on Education (ACE) letter [12] earlier this fall asking that ED consider adding several additional programs for consideration to the professional degrees list.

The Accountability in Higher Education and Access through Demand-driven Workforce Pell (AHEAD [13]) Committee began their work on Dec. 8, reaching consensus [14] on over a dozen changes to regulatory text regarding Pell grants on Dec. 12. The discussion focused on the qualifications for programs' eligibility in the Workforce Pell program, reports [15] *Inside Higher Ed.* The committee will begin work on accountability measures on Jan. 5.

Chancellor Schwartz Attends Competitiveness Forum in D.C.

CU Boulder Chancellor Justin Schwartz spoke at the 2025 National Competitiveness Forum in D.C. on Dec. 16 as part of a panel entitled "Riding the Wave of Disruption and Discontinuity." The event, hosted by the Council on Competitiveness [16], brings together public and private sector leaders to discuss ways to increase productivity and promote innovative research. Chancellor Schwartz is a member of the Council's Executive Committee.

While in DC, Chancellor Schwartz also met with Thomas Mason, Director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, and Darío Gil, Under Secretary for Science at the U.S. Department of Energy and project director of the newly announced Genesis Mission – a government-wide effort to double American research and innovation within a decade. Chancellor Schwartz was joined by Seth Marder, Director of the Renewable and Sustainable Energy Institute (CU Boulder's joint research institute with the National Laboratory of the Rockies): Kirsten Schuchman, Associate Vice Chancellor for External Partnerships; and Heather Bené, Senior Associate Vice President of Federal Relations.

Recent CU Advocacy Letters

CU Boulder and CU Anschutz signed onto a Dec. 11 multi-organization letter [17] to congressional appropriations leaders urging support for the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) in the FY26 appropriations process. The letter advocates for at least $1.5 billion to be provided in the FY26 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill and highlights the innovative health research conducted by ARPA-H-supported projects.

CU Boulder signed onto a multi-organization letter [18] to congressional leaders on Dec. 11 urging for the passage of natural hazards reauthorization bills. The letter emphasizes the importance of reauthorization for maintaining the core capabilities of federal hazard programs and promoting practical, science-based hazard preparedness. Waleed Abdalati, Executive Director of the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences [19] (CIRES), testified

[20] before Congress on the Weather Act Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3816 [21]) - one of the bills highlighted in the letter on Jul. 16.

Colorado Congressional Delegation Members Engage Department of Ed on MSI Grants
Members of Colorado's congressional delegation, including Sens. Michael Bennet and John Hickenlooper and Reps. Diana DeGette, Joe Neguse, Jason Crow, and Brittany Pettersen, sent a letter [22] on Dec. 2 to Department of Education (ED) Secretary Linda McMahon in opposition to ED's actions to cancel discretionary grant programs for Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

CU Federal Relations has engaged with our delegation regarding MSI discretionary grant funding on behalf of CU Denver|Anschutz.

Recent Capitol Hill Visits
Rick George, Athletic Director at CU Boulder, and several student-athletes, who serve on CU Boulder's Student Athlete Advisory Committee, met virtually with staff from the offices of Reps. DeGette, Neguse, Crow, and Pettersen on Dec. 2 to discuss the SCORE Act.

Hillary Fouts, Acting Associate Vice Chancellor and Vice Provost of Research at UCCS, met with staff from the offices of Sens. Bennet and Hickenlooper and Rep. Crank on Dec. 4. Fouts also met with National Science Foundation staff on Dec. 5.

Recent Congressional Staff Visits
Staff from the offices of Reps. Gabe Evans and Jeff Crank joined CU this month at CU Denver SPA's December First Friday Event and UCCS's Fall Commencement luncheon.

Happy Holidays from CU Federal Relations ??
The CU Federal Relations team wishes you and your family happy holidays and a wonderful New Year!

Warm wishes,
Danielle, Natalie, Heather, Brett, Annie, and Riley

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