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Federal Government Update - 12.12.25 [1]

December 12, 2025 by Riley Black [2]

Dear Colleagues,

Please find a federal government update from our teams.

House Passes Annual Defense Policy Bill
The U.S. House passed the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026* (NDAA, S. 1070 [3]) on Dec. 10 by a vote of 312-112 [4]. The legislation authorizes funding and sets policy for the Department of War (DOW) for the next year.

This year's bill authorizes nearly $901 billion for the DOW in FY 26, according to a release [5] from the House Armed Services Committee, although enacted funding levels will ultimately be determined by congressional appropriators. The measure also specifically authorizes $146 billion for DOW Research, Development, Testing and Evaluation (RDT&E), an increase of $1.9 billion over FY25.

Notably, the legislation prohibits the DOW from changing or capping indirect cost (IDC) rates on research awards to colleges and universities, unless the Secretary and Congress reach a compromise with the extramural research community on a new model. The DOW tried to implement a 15 percent IDC cap on new research awards in June, a move challenged by the national higher education associations and halted by a U.S. district court. At the request of the national associations, CU Boulder provided a declaration of impact [6] in the case.

The measure also omits some problematic provisions contained in previous drafts, including the *SAFE Research Act*, which the Association and Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and the Association of American Universities (AAU) publicly opposed [7]. This provision would have prohibited all federal research agencies, including the DOW, from providing research and development project funding to researchers who collaborate with "foreign adversaries."

The legislation also codifies elements of 15 national security focused executive orders, reforms the DOW acquisition process, formalizes the Golden Dome Initiative, changes laws governing DOW civilians, and more.

The Senate is expected to pass the measure next week and send it to the President, who said he will sign it in a statement of administration policy [8]. The NDAA is one of the few bills passed by Congress on an annual basis.

White House Launches GENESIS Mission
The White House issued an executive order [9] on Nov. 24 entitled "Launching the GENESIS Mission," a national effort to "double the productivity and impact of American research and

innovation within a decade" using artificial intelligence (AI). The GENESIS Mission will focus on three challenges: American energy dominance, advancing discovery science, and ensuring national security, according to a press release [10] from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), which will lead the initiative. DOE is directed to identify at least 20 science and technology challenges that span priority domains, including advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, critical minerals, nuclear fission and fusion energy, quantum and semiconductors, and microelectronics to address through the initiative within the next 60 days. The White House plans to update the list on an annual basis.

Central to the project is the creation of an "integrated discovery platform" that connects the world's best supercomputers, AI systems, and next-generation quantum systems. The platform will be "the world's most complex and powerful scientific instrument ever built," says DOE. While the executive order does not provide funding for the GENESIS Mission, it does instruct the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to "launch coordinated funding opportunities and prize competitions" to incentivize participation.

DOE Under Secretary for Science Darío Gil, who will serve as project director of the Mission, penned an op-ed [11] in *Science* alongside Kathryn Moler from Stanford on Nov. 26 highlighting his views on the effort.

White House Releases AI Preemption Executive Order

The White House issued an executive order [12] on Dec. 11 entitled "Ensuring a National Policy Framework for Artificial Intelligence (AI)." The order directs a review of all state and local AI laws with the goal of working with Congress to establish a national AI standard. The order requires the U.S. Attorney General's office to challenge existing state AI laws, the Secretary of Commerce to withhold Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program funding to states with burdensome AI laws and the Federal Trade Commission to issue a policy statement on "deceptive acts or practices affecting commerce" within state AI laws.

"State legislatures have introduced over 1,000 different AI bills, creating a patchwork of rules, disclosures, and reporting requirements," explains an accompanying fact sheet [13]. The White House specifically cites efforts in California and Colorado to implement new requirements for AI companies that will "censor outputs and insert left-wing ideology in their programming." The Government Relations and General Counsel offices are monitoring the impact this order will have on CU and Colorado.

White House Issues RFI on Accelerating the American Scientific Enterprise

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy issued [14] a Request for Information (RFI) on Nov. 25 on "Accelerating the American Scientific Enterprise." Academia, industry, state and local governments, and other stakeholders are encouraged to contribute to inform White House efforts "to advance and maintain" U.S. science and technology leadership. The RFI includes 13 specific questions on issues such as regulatory burden, tech transfer policies, accelerating high-risk, high-reward research, updating federal grantmaking to increase return on investment, leveraging and preparing for advances in artificial intelligence, strengthening research security, and more. Comments are due Dec. 26.

Department of Education Seeks Stakeholder Input on Accreditation

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced [15] on Dec. 10 that it is seeking higher education stakeholder input to "reenvision and update" the Accreditation Handbook [16] via a Request For Information [17] published Dec. 11 in the *Federal Register*. Department officials

requested feedback on policies that encourage innovation and reduce college costs, mechanisms to “incentivize intellectual diversity” through accreditation, assessment benchmarks to reflect student competency, and ways to streamline guidance for accrediting agencies. There is a 45-day public comment period. ED also said it will undertake negotiated rulemaking on accreditation next year.

Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Employees Return to Work
The U.S. Department of Education is bringing back more than 260 employees from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) this month, reports [18] *Inside Higher Ed*. The employees, who have been on administrative leave since March due to the federal administration’s reductions in force, were asked to return to work while their layoffs, which are currently blocked in federal court, play out.

CDC Panel Makes Changes to Childhood Vaccinations
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted [19] on Dec. 5 to end universal Hepatitis B recommendations for newborns. The committee now recommends that parents consult their health care provider and decide whether and when to have their child vaccinated.

The vote follows the CDC’s restructuring of ACIP to better align with the Make America Healthy Again initiative [20]. The ACIP meeting also included a working group presentation about the safety of aluminum adjuvants in vaccines; however, no action was taken on this issue.

The Federal Relations and General Counsel teams are actively monitoring developments at the federal level. We are working closely with the President and Chancellors, as well as the Colorado congressional delegation to champion CU priorities. We are committed to keeping you informed. Please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions page [21] for up-to-date communications and federal memos.

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