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# **The Federal Update for June 7, 2024**

From: Michael Brustein, Julia Martin, Steven Spillan, Kelly Christiansen

Re: Federal Update

Date: June 7, 2024

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## News

### Senate to Hold WIOA Hearing Next Week

The Senate has scheduled a hearing on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for next Wednesday, June 12. The hearing comes approximately two months after the House of Representatives approved legislation to reauthorize WIOA, which was last reauthorized nearly 10 years ago. The Senate is reportedly working to craft their own WIOA reauthorization bill, as opposed to voting on the House legislation, but the event scheduled for next week is not a markup, indicating that the Senate has not yet finished drafting legislation.

[The hearing will be webcast here](https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/the-workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-supporting-efforts-to-meet-the-needs-of-youth-workers-and-employers). Witnesses have not yet been announced.

Author: KSC

### Lawmakers Say ED Blocking GAO Investigation

In a letter sent to Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona early this week, Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Representative Virginia Foxx (R-NC), the top Republicans on the Senate and House Committees on Education, criticized the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for its rollout of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). “If not fully identified and addressed,” states the letter, “ongoing problems with the FAFSA will create complications for schools and college students for at least the next two academic years.” The letter also alleged that ED is “hiding evidence relating to its botched FAFSA rollout” by interfering with an investigation by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO).

In letters sent to ED last month, GAO head, Comptroller General Gene Dodaro, said the government watchdog has met with the agency “numerous times” and offered “accommodations” to allow the agency to gather the information requested. However, Dodaro wrote, “continued delays have impacted [GAO’s] progress on the work and ability to meet [its] expected timeframe for issuance” of its findings.

The Cassidy-Foxx letter asks Cardona to produce copies of all records requested by GAO by today, June 7, and that they receive copies of the records provided.

But in a May 29 letter shared with reporters, ED insists that it provided “responsive information to nearly every category of request” and conducted and scheduled interviews with GAO investigators. In this letter, ED says that it has worked with GAO to ensure that the current rollout and deadlines were prioritized. ED also suggests that additional staff who have been working on the FAFSA will soon have more time to “devote to other key priorities such as these GAO engagements without further jeopardizing the 2024-25 FAFSA,” the department said.

The [Cassidy-Foxx letter is here](https://www.help.senate.gov/rr-letter-to-secretary-cardona-fafsa-may-31pdf).

Author: JCM

### House Republicans Announce Investigations into Antisemitism at Colleges

The Chairs of several House committees announced oversight investigations into 10 institutions of higher education this week regarding antisemitism at those schools. Each institution received a letter from the Republican leaders of the Committees on Education and the Workforce, Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce, Judiciary, Oversight and Accountability, and Science, Space, and Technology.

Each of the Committees involved in the investigations will review issues related to federal funding, civil rights, and antisemitism within the Committee’s purview. The 10 institutions which received a notice are Barnard College, Columbia University, University of California – Berkeley, University of California – Los Angeles, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University, and Cornell University. The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights has already opened investigations into many of these institutions, and leaders from some institutions have testified in front of Congressional Committees regarding their actions to mitigate antisemitism on campus.

The letters tell the institutions that “Congress will not stand idly by and allow an environment hostile to Jewish students to persist.” The lawmakers also state that “universities receiving hundreds of millions of federal funds annually have denied students that opportunity and have been hijacked to become venues for the promotion of terrorism, antisemitic harassment and intimidation, unlawful encampments, and in some cases, assaults and riots.” While the letters are signed by Republican Committee Chairs, the letters also note bipartisan support for the investigations.

The letters do not specify what action Congress will be taking as part of the oversight, except that lawmakers will review “the use of federal funds” at the colleges and their “learning environment[s].”

Author: KSC

## Reports

### ED OIG Releases Semiannual Report to Congress

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Inspector General (ED OIG) recently published its semiannual report to Congress, which outlines the activities of the agency from October 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024.

ED OIG continued its audit work on COVID-19 relief funds, issuing two reports within a larger series reviewing State educational agencies’ (SEAs’) oversight of local educational agencies’ American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief plans and spending. ED OIG also issued the first report in a new audit series it has planned that is reviewing whether SEAs are implementing their accountability systems under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in alignment with their approved State plans. ED OIG will likely be reviewing additional States under this audit series moving forward. Overall, ED OIG’s recent audit work resulted in 11 reports with a total of 73 recommendations for grantees. Those reports were a mix of Federal Student Aid, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and Office of Financial Operations-related audits.

ED OIG also closed 28 fraud and corruption investigations, which included millions of dollars in settlements and restitution, as well as criminal action. Some of these investigations include a fraud enrollment scheme at an online charter school, embezzlement by a Senior Director of Fiscal Services at a school district, student loan discharge fraud, and a school district’s career and technical education coordinator directing federal funds to a company owned by a friend. The closed investigations over the past several months resulted in over $60 million in recoveries, restitution, settlements, fines, etc.

[The full semiannual report to Congress is available here](https://oig.ed.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2024-06/FY24%2520SAR88%25285.30.24%2529v100_508_SECURED.pdf).

Author: KSC

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