

October 2018

**Open Budget Process Increases Education Funding, Particularly for Career Education and Charter Schools –
Don't Forget to Vote on November 6!**

For the first time in recent memory, before the beginning of the Federal Government fiscal year on October 1, the President signed into law a new budget for the public schools that had been proposed by the House of Representatives, debated and amended by the Senate, and differences resolved through a conference committee. The \$854 billion package of appropriations bills signed by the President on September 28 included funding for the Departments of Education, Defense, Labor, Health and Human Services.

This marked a return, at least in part, to “regular order” for the budget process, and is something I have prayed for regularly over the past several years. Why is this such a big deal?

[Senator Richard Shelby \(R-Ala.\), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee said](#), “The signing of this legislation marks a drastic turnaround in the way we have funded the government in recent years...” “As of today, 75 percent of the government is funded — on time and through an open, bipartisan process.” The bills signed by the President included a continuing resolution that level funded the other 25% of the discretionary budget, including the Department of Homeland Security. The continuing resolution put off a fight with the President over border wall funding until December—well after the November mid-term elections.

For over a decade, instead of considering each department budget separately, huge omnibus spending bills which contained all discretionary funding were created behind closed doors by small leadership groups negotiating compromises between Democrats and Republicans. This process concentrated power in the hands of a small group of House and Senate leaders, sapping power and input from many legislators.

From my point of view this concentration of power tied the spiritual hands of our democracy. Many of the 535 legislators we elect to represent us in Congress are good men and women, frequently Christians, who want to serve the nation with wisdom and integrity. Because many of them pray for guidance, when they have input, the light of the Holy Spirit can illuminate their deliberations. In this way, a democracy—particularly a democracy in a nation with many Christians—can be a real blessing to a nation. Restricting the input of individual legislators throws a wet blanket over this potential blessing. This is not to say that the will of God for our nation will be hampered though a secretive legislative process, but it does mean that we are unlikely to witness divine wisdom bubbling up through an open and deliberative one. When the public can see the process and know that prayerful legislators have had a hand in it, we can feel encouraged and more confident in the outcome.

So, what was the outcome of the new education budget? Media reports on the budget have been scant, drowned out by the embarrassing hoopla around the confirmation of Justice Kavanaugh. But this [article and chart from Education Week](#) gives us the big picture.

Reviewing the chart, the first thing I noticed was that there was no huge cut in public education. Instead, there were modest increases for the big education programs: Title I, special education grants

(IDEA), and Head Start. This reflects the fact that the overwhelming majority of both Democrats and Republicans do support education funding.

While many thought that President Trump would push for a huge increase in school choice funding, it did not materialize. However, there was a 10% or \$40 million increase in funding for charter schools.

Career and Technical Education received a healthy \$70 million or 6% increase in funding. This was expected in light of the fact that the other major education bill to pass this year was a long overdue [reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#), which is the authorizing statute for Career and Technical Education. This effort was strongly supported by the Trump administration as part of their broad effort to create more jobs.

There is another huge education bill that is long overdue for reauthorization. As we reported to you in June, a bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, titled the PROSPER Act (Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform), passed the House Education and Workforce Committee by a party-line 23-17 vote and has been lying dormant since then, waiting for action by the entire House. The inaction on this bill and the fact that the funding package did pull back \$600 million in unspent Higher Education scholarship money from the Pell Grant Reserve Fund has caused some to wonder if Congress may be planning cuts or a restructuring of Higher Education funding. Time will tell, but it cannot happen until after the midterm elections—Congress is out of session until then.

Don't forget that you have an opportunity through voting on November 6 to be salt and light for our political process. Your prayerful consideration of which candidates are most likely to promote laws that will allow the Gospel of Christ to flourish, and your vote for these men and women is an important Christian responsibility.

Please share your thoughts on this column by entering them below. John Mitchell is the Washington, DC Area Director for the Christian Educators Association.