

August 15, 2020

“What Will We Wish We Had Done?”**August 2020**

Dear Colleagues:

Most political analysts will tell you that if the national election was held today, the Democrats would take total control of the federal government in Washington. The House would remain Democrat. And if Biden wins comfortably, most believe the Democrats would also control the Senate.

This means Senators Durbin and Warren would be in charge of the Senate! It also suggests that while potential future President Biden would focus on other issues, there would be a new wave of ideological opponents at the Department of Education seeking to reverse positive changes in policy over the past four years. As you all know, Biden’s announcement of Kamala Harris as his running mate is terrible news for our sector. In a January CNN Town Hall Meeting she called for the elimination of the sector!

The question I am asking myself every day – and I need all of you to ask yourselves over the next three months is the same: *What will we wish we had done?*

Currently, we consider the Senate the backstop that can prevent bad proposals from becoming law. For example, we are confident the current Senate will not approve the 85/15 proposal in the Labor/Education/HHS Appropriations Bill; or the counting of Military Assistance Dollars in the 90/10 calculation as included in the Defense Authorization Act. As unlikely as it may seem in the August heat, the House of Representatives may need to become the focus of our work. And for this to happen, we need approximately 20 reliable Democrats to join with Republicans in ways that can stop some of the most harmful proposals.

What We Have Learned:

Three things are happening that change how we approach our advocacy.

First, many of our schools are in urban areas and thus Democrat Congressional Districts. As you know, 51% of our students enrolled in 2-year and less schools are either African-American or Hispanic. If you know anything about the traditional Member of Congress, they want to “take care of their people back home!” We see some evidence that as we communicate to these urban Members of Congress how some of these proposals would impact students in their district, we are seeing some evidence of emerging support. For many, they see our sector as the bridge to reducing the current income inequality gaps in America today.

Second, we know that our opponents are targeting Veterans’ dollars (GI Benefits) coming to our schools. Annually, our sector schools receive over \$1.1 billion in GI Benefits each year through Veterans enrolling in our schools. Our opponents know that if they can stop Veterans’ benefits coming to our schools, they can then defund our sector from Title IV and any other federal support!

Third, we know that COVID-19 has already changed how groups lobby the Congress, and how Members of Congress decide to vote. Today, Members of Congress want to hear from their constituents back home, not from paid lobbyists. Today, with the Government shut down to public meetings during the pandemic, traditional lobbying on Capitol Hill just doesn’t happen. Phone calls, emails, and Zoom meetings are about all that is available. Finally, we

know that if the Democrats control all aspects of the government they will take further steps to reduce the potential influence of big money. In summary, lobbying of the future will be through local advocacy!

Our Triangle Strategy!

With this as background, here is how we are preparing for the unknown future.

1. Identify and target Democrats who should be supporting our sector, our students who are their constituents.

CECU has spent significant time evaluating Members of Congress, their ideology, the make-up of their district, the number of schools and students in such districts, and their past votes/statements on our sector. Through this work, we have created 3 tiers of targets. We have listed 23 Tier 1 targets; 28 Tier 2 targets; and 7 Tier 3 targets. Obviously, our priorities are the 23 Tier 1 targets. We need these Members to become reliable and informed voices for our sector. Tier 2 represents those Members we hope to get on specific votes, but not always. Tier 3 represents a small group of Members we think should be supportive, but there is just no knowledge or evidence of how they feel. We see them as "untapped potential."

Many of these Members are African-American or Hispanic. And thus, we have engaged a Democrat lobby firm with strong ties to both the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. But we are also beginning to target the Democrats' Blue Dog Caucus – which is a group of moderate to conservative Democrats who understand and support small business.

2. Last year we created the Campaign to Protect Veterans' Access. In our first year, we were able to raise over \$600,000 to support this work. And what a year it was. We held over 40 Veteran Rallies at schools across the country. We signed up over 1,700 Veterans to join Veterans for Career Education – an organization of, by, and for Veterans advocating for access to career education.

We are still raising funds for year two. If you have not donated to this important work, contact me so I can further explain our work, our research, and our advocacy of and for Veterans and their desire to pursue a career focused education.

3. Many of you already use paid and targeted social media for the marketing of your school. Many businesses do the same. But until just recently, few engage targeted social media for advocacy. And we are the ones building out this initiative.

We have come to recognize that our schools are busy educating their students. Grassroots engagement just doesn't engage very many people (faculty, staff, students, etc.). And so we've begun, with the help of an outside expert in the use of Targeted Social Media for Advocacy to engage local citizens – often Veterans – in support of our sector and our policy positions. Our next hope is to invest some of our resources to lift up the constituents and their voices in many of these targeted districts. We have already seen evidence that it works. One U.S. Senator's office contacted us and said, "If you stop these social media posts about my opposition, we will work with you to find a compromise we can all support!"

In Conclusion:

We are less than 90 days from the national election. We don't yet know what will happen. And some very smart people still believe that the U.S. Senate could remain under Republican (friendly) control, and that Trump's support base is larger than the pollsters believe. But if the election results in total Democrat control, we want to look back on these times and say, "We invested in a strategy that created a new group of informed and supportive Democrat Members of Congress. And we are really, really glad we did!"

Enjoy the waning days of summer. Good luck with your fall programs. And we welcome your help in advancing the strategies I shared above.

Sincerely,

Steve Gunderson