

# Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association

Education For Children, Fairness for Taxpayers

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## AGENDA

FLISA Summer Meeting

June 24, 2017

Kimpton Hotel Monaco Baltimore

*Breakfast is On Your Own*

*Meeting begins at 8:30 AM*

*Lunch at Noon – Reception following the meeting*

**Our Mission: To secure federal funding which reimburses eligible districts for tax revenue lost (for student programs) due to the federal government's removal of land from the local tax rolls; such revenue to be used for the public education of students.**

- I. Introductions – Bob Reichert
- II. Paid Membership Roll Call (Tom Gregory)
- III. Meeting Logistics (Tom Madden)
- IV. Executive Director's Report (Tom Madden)
  - A. Status of President's Budget for 8002
  - B. Brief History Lesson
  - C. Advocacy Action Plan
- V. Present FLISA Video



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- VI. Targeted Lobbying – Fall NAFIS Conference (Tom Schneider)
- VII. Continuation of work on the Advocacy Action Plan to a full review and renewal/updating
  - *Committees review past work and list accomplishments and goals that have been met*
  - *Committees establish new goals, objectives and time lines*
  - *Committees will report out Saturday afternoon and include steps to be taken prior to the NAFIS Fall Conference*
- VIII. Approval of Minutes from Spring NAFIS Conference (Cassie Bergman)
- IX. Treasurer’s Report and Approval of the 2017-18 Budget (Tom Gregory)
- X. NAFIS Update (Sandy Doebert/Tom Schneider)
- XI. Old Business
  - A. Report on FRO (Bob Reichert and Tom Schneider)
  - B. Other
- XII. New Business
  - A. 8002 Issues for Fall NAFIS Conference?
  - B. Identify issues with Impact Aid Application and/or Payments?
  - C. Other Items



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- XIII. Information Items
- XIV. Winter Meeting – January 6, 2018 at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa, 5001 Coconut Road, Bonita Springs, FL 34134 – Registration/Reservation information will be available at the NAFIS Fall Conference
- XV. Summer, 2018, Meeting Options
- XVI. Other Items from Membership
- XVII. Review of Mission and Vision to End the Meeting (Bob Reichert)

***NOTE: LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED TO  
CONFERENCE ATTENDEES AND A POST-  
MEETING RECEPTION WILL BE HELD FOR  
ATTENDEES AND THEIR GUESTS***

Meeting Minutes  
Spring NAFIS Conference 2017  
Monday, March 13, 2017

I. President Bob Reichert called the meeting to order and thanked the membership for attending. He distributed the Talking Points handout to take to the Hill on Tuesday and reminded everyone to complete the legislator visit spreadsheet that was originally distributed on Sunday.

II. Old Business – Carry-over items from Sunday’s Meeting

- A. Website Update – Terry Tamblyn reported that the new website (FLISA.org) is up and running. A national firm was hired to assist in the development and we have received numerous compliments. Further information regarding the website are as follows:
  - 1. Currently working on a video and updating the definition of terms and FAQ’s
  - 2. Links to NAFIS, Hyatt, History of FLISA, Bluebook, all member district websites
  - 3. Needs pictures and videos from member districts
  - 4. Looking at changing media link to thumbnails
  - 5. Remind the Legislative Aides to visit our website when you go to the Hill
- B. NAFIS Board Update – Tom Schneider reported that the NAFIS board held elections yesterday and there are representatives from each subgroup serving. Representing FLISA are Sandy Doebert who will be on the Board for the next two years as Past President and Tom Schneider who is now the Secretary.
- C. Past and Future Meetings
  - 1. Winter 2017 meeting held in Austin Texas was well attended and productive.
  - 2. Summer 2017 meeting will be held in Baltimore, Maryland at the Kimpton Hotel on June 24, 2017.
  - 3. Winter 2018 meeting location will be announced at the Summer 2017 meeting.

III. Continued Work on the Advocacy Action Plan Implementation – Tom Madden had the membership split into their respective work groups and distributed the “Goals to Committee Work” handout as a guideline. After twenty minutes the membership reconvened and reported on their progress.

- A. Involvement Committee
  - 1. Continue coordination of state meetings
  - 2. Development of an accurate data base with updated contact information
  - 3. Identification of key legislators
- B. Messaging Committee
  - 1. Currently working on a video to be presented at the summer 2017 meeting
  - 2. Working on the list of terms, definitions and FAQ’s for website
  - 3. Promoting individual school district videos
- C. Technology Committee
  - 1. The website is being visited more regularly
  - 2. Promote individual videos in conjunction with the messaging committee
  - 3. Reviewing the home page for possible changes

IV. Other Items – Tom Madden reminded the membership to stay involved and thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting was adjourned by Bob Reichert at 9:45 a.m.




# Republicans Are 4-0 Defending Seats, but Could Still Be in Trouble

In each of the contested special elections, Democrats performed better than they had in years

Posted Jun 21, 2017

3:42 PM

 Sean McMinn  
@Sean McMinn

Where the Cash Is Coming From in Georgia and South Carolina Special Elections

What the Shooting Suspect Has Said About Republicans in Letters

Say What? Senators' Questions for Comey, a Roll Call Analysis



Karen Handel gives her victory speech Tuesday night in Georgia after winning the 6th District special election. (Jessica McGowan/Getty Images)

Wednesday was a day for Republicans to rest easy. After winning the Georgia and South Carolina special elections Tuesday, the party avoided losing any congressional seats vacated by members who entered President Donald Trump's administration.

But it's not all good news for the GOP (or bad news for Democrats). In each of the four races where Republicans were defending seats — Kansas' 4th, Montana's at large seat, South Carolina's 5th and Georgia's 6th — Democrats did better than they had in any of those districts' congressional elections since at least 2010.

In fact, in almost all these GOP stronghold races, Democrats did even better than in 2006 and 2008 — the last time voters sent Democratic majorities to the House. The only exception was South Carolina, where the 5th District elected Democrats in 2006 and 2008.

None of this on its own is enough to declare that the Republican House majority is done for in 2018. As Roll Call election analyst Nathan L. Gonzales put it: "The House majority was at risk before the Georgia special election and it's at risk after the Georgia special election."

The biggest drop off for Republicans came in Kansas, where now-CIA director Mike Pompeo won re-election with 62 percent of the vote last year. His replacement, Republican Rep. Ron Estes, won only 52 percent in his special election.

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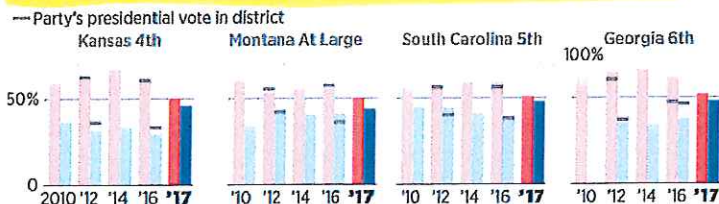
STATE TRACK

[Video: History and Reality Suggest 2018 Will Be Good for Democrats]

Montana, where the Republican candidate was arrested for assaulting a reporter the day before the election, was the race where Republicans came closest to their 2016 vote level. GOP Rep. Greg Gianforte, sworn in Wednesday, picked up half of the state's vote total on special election day — six points short of what his predecessor earned last year.

The chart below shows how congressional candidates have performed in these four districts, as well as the presidential election results in them.

### Congressional Vote History in the Special Election Districts



Source: CQ Press, Daily Kos  
Sean McMinn/CQ Roll Call

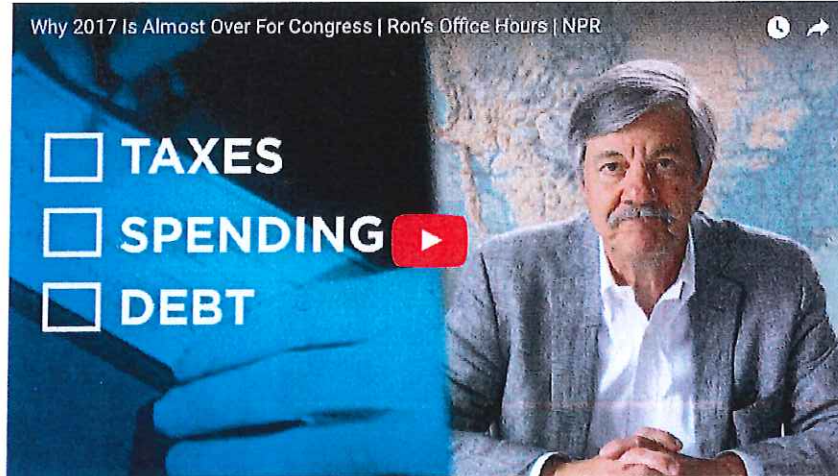
A special election in California also took place so far this year but was not included in the above chart since it was previously a Democratic seat and the runoff was between two Democrats. Jimmy Gomez won that seat vacated by Xavier Becerra who left to become the state's attorney general.

POLITICS

# Why Time Is Already Running Out For Trump And His Congress

June 18, 2017 · 7:00 AM ET

 **RON ELVING**



NPR via YouTube

For most people, 2017 has yet to reach its midpoint. But that is not the case for Congress, which has already burned more than half its scheduled legislative days without accomplishing much of its historic agenda.

In recent years, partisan gridlock has kept Congress from major achievements. But this year was supposed to be different. For the first time in a decade, Republicans have control of the White House as well as both chambers of Congress. Expectations for action were high.

But expectations have been lowered as the first five months went by and legislative accomplishments remained sparse. The House passed a version of a health care bill that the Senate has treated as radioactive. Other priorities remain stuck further up the pipeline, and the prospect of a banner year on Capitol Hill is ebbing fast.

How can that be when it's still technically spring? It has to do with congressional rules and the congressional calendar.

There is still time for the Hill to move the repeal-and-replacement of the Affordable Care Act, the annual federal budget, some kind of tax cut and a debt ceiling increase. There is still a chance for an infrastructure bill and a start on rewriting the underlying tax code.

But August comes at you fast, and after that Capitol Hill's calendar is dominated by recesses and holidays — with September devoted to spending bills that keep the government up and running.

To be fair, Congress regards time away from Washington as time on the job — officially "district work periods." This means that you are working back home, meeting with constituents and listening to their concerns. Some members visit military bases around the world or look into how American foreign aid is being spent.



POLITICS  
**A Pattern In Trump's Policy Pitches: Paltry Particulars**



POLITICS  
**Trump Administration Vows 'Biggest Tax Cut,' 'Largest' Overhaul In History**



These congressional delegations or "co-dels" as they are known, have often been derided as junkets — thinly veiled excuses for world travel at taxpayer expense. But they can also be important in fulfilling Congress' oversight role.

So we are not saying that Congress out of town is Congress goofing off. What we are saying is that when Congress leaves town, it cannot legislate. And that means the opportunity for Congress to accomplish its agenda — or that of President Trump — is rapidly diminishing.

And the dwindling weeks on the calendar are not even the worst of it. In terms of Hill procedure, the best chance to pass bills is between the beginning of the Congress in the first week of January and the end of the fiscal year in the last week of September.

Why? Because this nine-month window offers the best time to pass major legislation affecting the tax-and-spending policies of the federal government using a process known as *reconciliation*.

That's the kind of word that means something to insiders (reconciling new fiscal policy with existing law) and also tends to make everyone else stop paying attention. But bear with us.

This process, invented in the 1970s and first used extensively in the early 1980s, is how big tax cuts were passed in the first year of Ronald Reagan's presidency and again in the first year of George W. Bush.

It's part of how the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) got through in 2010. And it's important to everything else the Congress will or won't get done this year.

It allows bills that affect revenue and outlays to pass both House and Senate by a simple majority vote with no filibusters allowed. That means a mere 51 votes are required in the Senate, instead of 60 that would otherwise be needed to advance a bill.

The majority Republicans of 2017 can legislate fiscal policy without a single Democratic vote, so long as they stay within the limits and rules of the reconciliation process.

You may have noticed that the 60-vote requirement to defeat filibusters has been in the news lately. That is because the majority Republicans changed the rules regarding filibusters to get President Trump's first appointee to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch, confirmed.

Pleased with that outcome, the president has subsequently said the filibuster should be eliminated entirely — for legislation as well as appointments. He has repeatedly tweeted about it. But the Senate doesn't want to eliminate the filibuster for legislation. The institution doesn't want to, and the individual senators do not want to.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said there is not one Republican who wants to kill the filibuster for legislation. Not one. And, obviously, the minority Democrats aren't eager to kill the ~~filib~~uster either, at least not while it's their last remaining weapon in the minority.



#### COMMENTARY

[Comey Drama A Reminder Presidential Disaster Often Happens In Times Of High Confidence](#)



#### POLITICS

[The First 100 Days: 'A Standard That Not Even Roosevelt Achieved'](#)

So reconciliation stands as the Republicans' best friend, so long as they move the health care bill soon — preferably before they move the 2018 fiscal year budget and complicate the availability of the reconciliation procedure.

That is why McConnell was eager to get health care done early. He was counting on reconciliation to allow passage with just a bare majority, and he was also hoping to have as much time as possible for other matters to have the Senate's full attention.

So, for all practical purposes, this Congress' best window of opportunity for major achievements is going to close rather soon.

That would be OK if all the big stuff was well on its way to passage. But nothing could be further from the reality of this moment.

On the health care overhaul, the Senate is still stuck at the "task force" stage with a "pig in a poke" bill that McConnell refuses to make public. And the struggle over the budget and the dozen appropriations bills needed to avoid a government shutdown has barely begun.

Somewhere in the next several weeks, the Congress must also raise the debt ceiling to permit more borrowing to cover the bonds and other securities that are coming due. The alternative would be the first default in U.S. history, and at least a partial government shutdown.

Suffice it to say neither a shutdown nor a default would be in the game plan for the congressional leadership. The president has spoken of a "good shutdown" that might refocus people's priorities, but that is not a tactic embraced on Capitol Hill. In fact, it sends shudders.

Painful though these circumstances may be, the prospect of shutdown or default has yet to break through the other preoccupations of the moment or receive much attention from the media.

There is just too much other news, from the shooting at a congressional baseball practice to climate change to the president's tweets — and all the distracting internal struggles fracturing the Republicans' supposedly united front.

And the longer all these circumstances dominate, the less time there will be for Congress to do the legislative heavy lifting it needs to do now.

Watch more episodes of *Ron's Office Hours* on the [NPR YouTube channel](#).



#### POLITICS

Trump May Be Spoiling For A Shutdown Fight, But It Could Spell Disaster In 2018



SATURDAY, JUN 17, 2017 04:58 AM CDT

# Trump is selling a privatization scam and calling it an infrastructure plan

Scorning serious proposals, the White House offers a Trump University plan for employment

JEFFERSON MORLEY, ALTERNET



SKIP TO COMMENTS

TOPICS: ALTERNET, INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN, TRUMP BUDGET, TRUMP UNIVERSITY, POLITICS NEWS, NEWS



(Credit: AP Photo/Kelley McCall, File)

## ALTERNET

President Trump's original proposal for a \$1 trillion infrastructure jobs plan was, in principle, a worthy idea, a practical way to create jobs and improve the country's highways, bridges, railways, and airports. In reality, Trump's jobs agenda is a sham that does not involve a trillion dollars, won't do much for the country's infrastructure and won't create many jobs.

That became obvious Monday during the first installment of what the Trump White House billed as "infrastructure" week: a televised event designed to look like a signing ceremony. Before the cameras, the president made only a very modest proposal calling on Congress to split air traffic control away from the Federal Aviation Administration and place it under a private, non-governmental entity. Trump made a show of signing two documents as if they were legislative bills or executive orders. In fact, they were merely statements of "legislative principles," according to the White House.

Trump's still-vague proposal bears all the marks of a large-scale bait and switch sales pitch like the one Trump perfected in selling fraudulent enterprises like the now-defunct Trump University to unsuspecting consumers.

### The Bait

The bait was the trillion-dollar figure, which suggested Trump would launch a massive effort that could have real stimulating effect on a \$13 trillion-a-year economy. The switch is found in a fact sheet distributed by the White House. Trump's 2018 budget involved the expenditure of no more than \$200 billion toward the goal of infrastructure jobs.



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The bait, promised by Trump at the White House event, is "cheaper, faster and safer travel." The switch, unmentioned at the event, is that Trump's 2018 budget seeks to cut \$175 million from the Essential Air Services program, which subsidizes air travel to remote areas, so that all regions of the country are guaranteed air access, even Hawaii and Alaska. If approved, Trump's budget proposal would actually dismantle one feature of the current air travel infrastructure that serves rural Americans.

### The Switch

Trump's air traffic privatization scheme is less concerned with creating jobs than with selling the idea of "public-private partnerships" as the way to rebuild the country's infrastructure. While there is no specific proposal for how these partnerships will work, or what they will build, the New York Times notes that the Trump approach calls on "states, cities and corporations to shoulder most of the cost of rebuilding roads, bridges, railways and waterways."

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Such partnerships have already been rejected in Texas. In May, Bloomberg News reported that the Republican-controlled Texas House of Representatives had voted to reject a bill that would have allowed the partnerships "to participate in 18 state highway projects costing as much as \$30 billion."

The legislators acted because of public opposition to the new highway tolls that the public-private partnerships would be able to impose, Bloomberg reported.

"The defeat leaves the second most-populous U.S. state unable to tap into the partnerships to finance the infrastructure improvements, even as Trump is proposing to expand their use," Bloomberg noted.

In short, Trump's infrastructure plan bears no resemblance to a serious infrastructure jobs proposal. It ignores the proposal made last week by the AFL-CIO. It ignores the list of needed infrastructure projects cited by the American Society of Civil Engineers, which says that "dedicated public funding sources on the local, state, and federal levels need to be consistently and sufficiently funded from user-generated fees."

It has nothing in common with the Senate Democrats' Blueprint to Rebuild America's Infrastructure, announced last year.

These sorts of programs could create up to 11 million jobs, with 55 percent of them going to high school graduates and high school dropouts, according to a Georgetown University study released earlier this year. It would especially benefit "men in blue-collar occupations, who have been left behind due to economic changes over the past several decades."



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After the election, White House adviser Steve Bannon hyped Trump's plan as the key to the realignment of American politics.

"I'm the guy pushing a trillion-dollar infrastructure plan," Bannon told the Hollywood Reporter in November. "With negative interest rates throughout the world, it's the greatest opportunity to rebuild everything. Shipyards, ironworks, get them all jacked up. We're just going to throw it up against the wall and see if it sticks. It will be as exciting as the 1930s, greater than the Reagan revolution—conservatives, plus populists, in an economic nationalist movement."

Six months later, Bannon's fantasy has been exposed as a ruse. In fact, there is no plan to "rebuild everything"; no proposal designed to benefit lower-skilled workers or improve America's public works. Trump has swapped out serious ideas for a jobs program with a scheme to turn over public infrastructure assets to private interests, which would be able to extract profits under the flimsiest of supervision.

If you liked Trump University, you'll love Trump's infrastructure jobs plan.



Jefferson Morley is a staff writer for Salon in Washington and author of the forthcoming book, *Snow-Storm in August: Washington City, Francis Scott Key, and the Forgotten Race Riot of 1835* (Nan Talese/Doubleday).

The bait was that Trump's plan would be new. The switch is that his privatization proposal recycles an old idea, opposed by Democrats and Republicans alike.



# Commentary: Pay toll ahead; privatizing infrastructure comes with a trade-off



The city signed a 99-year lease to privatize the Chicago Skyway for \$1.8 billion in 2004. Investors will be collecting increased tolls long after the city's payday is gone. (E. Jason Wambsgans/Chicago Tribune)

By **Joseph L. Schofer**

JUNE 12, 2017, 5:55 PM

**T**he **Trump** administration promises to "solve" the crisis in public infrastructure by attracting large amounts of private money to bail us out. The Midwest, and Chicago in particular, have had some experience with infrastructure privatization, not all of it good, so perhaps we can use that experience to help ourselves and others.

Let's start with the good news: There is a lot of private money around the world looking for solid investments. Investors are not just looking for the next killer app, but for investments that pay consistent returns over many decades — think busy toll roads and bridges. During President Donald Trump's recent visit to the Middle East, Saudi Arabia committed \$20 billion to a new Blackstone infrastructure fund.

This sounds good: Wealthy investors will buy our next new bridge or fix the old one. Maybe they'll extend the



CTA farther into the suburbs. If a private consortium secures a franchise to design, build, finance and operate a facility, such as the long-imagined south suburban airport or a new State of Illinois building, that consortium may be able to deliver the project faster and more cheaply than government, with efficiency coming from incentives built into contracts to make the consortium pay for schedule delays and cost overruns.

On its face, this seems like good news for the public. We won't, for example, have to raise the gas tax — frozen at the federal level since 1993. Our current infrastructure crisis arose largely because of the unwillingness of our leaders — less so their constituents — to raise fees and taxes to meet the costs of maintaining infrastructure. Keeping taxes as they were decades ago has given us plenty of potholes, not to mention 2,200 structurally deficient Illinois bridges.

A private investor might help prevent such a crisis from happening again. But remember, the difference between maintaining infrastructure through taxes or through private investment is that the private sector insists on getting its money back over time, along with interest and some profit. Repayment is an obligation, and profit is the incentive that brings money into the market. Both repayment and profit must come from somewhere, and that "somewhere" is us — facility users or the general public. Franchise holders will demand that we pay costs we've been able to dodge for many years.

So don't be surprised when we are asked to cough up more fees and tolls. Private money will flow to infrastructure for which access can be restricted to those who pay for it: toll roads and bridges, water supply systems and airports. Facilities that do not generate revenue, or enough revenue, may still benefit from private investment. For example, private money might be used to build or repair a school or park, but it will be repaid through annual lease fees, called availability payments, which will come from our government, of course.

Chicagoans may remember that tolls and fees can also be used to capitalize existing public infrastructure — that is, exchanging infrastructure we already own for money by leasing it to a private investor that takes the revenues generated to recover its costs and earn a profit. The 2008 parking meter deal gave the city (only) \$1.15 billion. In return, not only do we pay much higher rates for street parking, but the city must pay the franchise holder for lost revenue when a disabled motorist parks free. Trump suggests that we use such windfalls to build new infrastructure, but in our case, the city quickly used the revenue to pay some of its bills.

Don't forget that the private concessionaire will charge the users of a facility, such as an airport or toll bridge, for every cost, including construction, rehabilitation, maintenance, operations, interest on borrowing and inflation. Tolls doubled on the Indiana Toll Road on June 1 when a decade of state subsidies ended and the concessionaire began extracting full costs from travelers.

Further, while state transportation departments and toll road authorities don't price each roadway segment to support itself, a private investor needs to do just that, and network cross-subsidies — tolls from busy facilities helping to support important but less-used infrastructure — will go away.

Infrastructure privatization will make the price to use public infrastructure more palpable, and not deferrable. Under an aggressive privatization scheme, expect some tolled facilities to cost more, and some now-free facilities to be free no longer. Someone has to pay, and it is going to be us, and we'll pay entities that have no compunction about charging us more. Thus, we just might see pay toilets at interstate highway rest areas — shocking, perhaps, but truly a pay-as-you-go scheme!

This is not to say privatization has no place in public infrastructure — it can definitely bring us new and better infrastructure on someone else's dime, for a while. Check out the strikingly beautiful Jordan Bridge in South Norfolk, Va., which was designed, built and operates completely with private money. Tolled, of course. A similar bridge is being offered by the same consortium to Bay City, Mich. It's the way of the future. Tolled, of course.

How can we get the best for ourselves in a world of privatized infrastructure? We need careful and transparent contract negotiations that regulate pricing — for example, inflation-linked caps on tolls and fees and ways to assure access for vulnerable people. We must also demand contractual guarantees on facility performance (service quality) and condition (maintaining facilities in a state of good repair) throughout the life of the asset. Beware of backroom deals that sound too good to be true.

Can we get rid of public investment in infrastructure? Hardly, because many important classes of infrastructure will be unattractive to private investors. And we need systematic, strategic planning so we are not served solely by the tastes of private money managers. The government, user fees and taxes will continue to play a role to ensure that our economy and society have the full portfolio of infrastructure they need to survive and thrive.

*Joseph L. Schofer is a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northwestern University.*

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JUN. 15, 2017 AT 9:48 AM

# Why The GOP Is So Hell-Bent On Passing An Unpopular Health Care Bill

By [Perry Bacon Jr.](#)

Filed under [Health Care](#)

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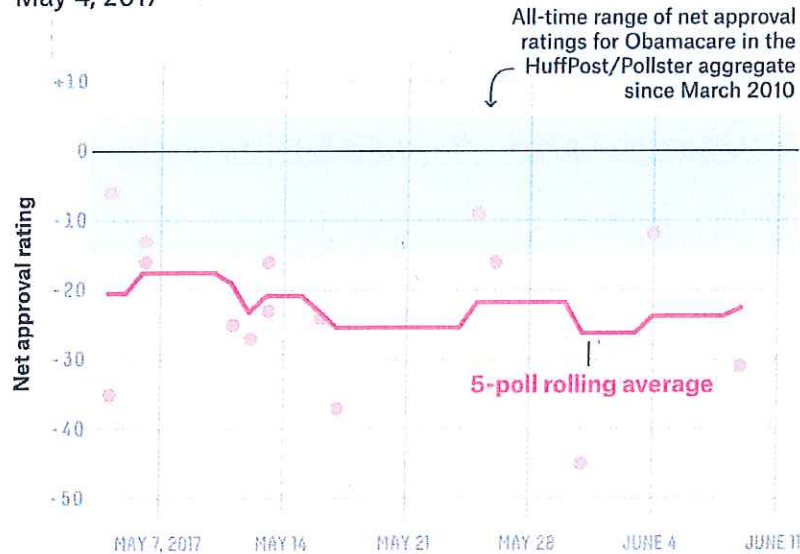


Congressional Republicans and President Trump seem hell-bent on pushing through a bill to replace parts of the Affordable Care Act. “Duh,” you say, “the Republicans have been promising to repeal Obamacare since **literally** the day it was passed.”

But here’s where things get interesting. We tend to assume political parties want to get their policy goals adopted, but also to stay in power. Republicans won control of Congress in 2010 **in part because** Democrats pushed through a health care bill that the plurality of voters did not approve of, according to **several major polls** from that time. The Republicans are doing the same thing now, only their health care bill is **significantly more unpopular** than the ACA was in 2010.

## The American Health Care Act is unpopular

Five-poll rolling average of AHCA net approval ratings since May 4, 2017



FiveThirtyEight

SOURCES: HUFFPOST/POLLSTER, VARIOUS POLLS

So why are Republicans so determined to pass a bill that they already seem to know is not popular and **could hurt them** in next year’s elections? It’s almost impossible to determine exactly what drives a politician’s actions, particularly because sometimes the reasons they give publicly are not their only or primary motives. So while we can’t prove anything, we can still identify four likely reasons that Republicans are pushing so hard on health care.

## 1. Promise keeping

There is a common view that politicians make promises, get elected and then don't try to follow through. Wrong. Political science studies show that [American presidents](#) actually do try to implement most of the agenda they campaigned on. The academic research is not as conclusive about members of the Congress, but Politifact found that in 2010, House Republicans [campaigned](#) on a 21-page set of proposals and brought nearly all of those ideas up for votes.

Throughout his campaign, Trump [promised](#) to repeal Obamacare, although he at times also made outlandish pledges about how he would replace it with a bill that offered [coverage to all Americans](#), which the legislation emerging from the Republican Congress is [unlikely](#) to do.

Much of the Republican Congress is also invested in repealing Obamacare. In January 2016, then-President Obama [vetoed a bill](#) to repeal Obamacare that was passed by the [House](#) and [Senate](#), both of which were under GOP control, with nearly all of the party's members in both chambers backing the legislation. Party officials [promised](#) after Obama's veto that they would get an Obamacare repeal signed if a Republican was put in the Oval Office.

"Republicans in Congress need to do what we told our constituents we would when they elected us: Repeal Obamacare and replace it with a plan that lowers premiums for everyday Americans," Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio congressman and key figure in the House Freedom Caucus, said in a statement to FiveThirtyEight.

He added, "I'm confident that if we do what we were elected to do, our constituents will like it."

## 2. Satisfying activists and donors

One main school of political scientists defines a political party as consisting of three parts: the party's voters, its elected officials, and the "[party-as-organization](#)," meaning the groups that support and influence the party, including powerful labor unions on the Democratic side and groups like the National Rifle Association for the GOP.

Polls suggest a majority of Republican voters support the health care repeal effort, but it is nowhere near universal. A recent [Kaiser poll](#), for example, found that 67 percent of Republicans had a favorable view of the House version of the Obamacare repeal legislation, while 18 percent viewed the bill unfavorably and another 15 percent didn't give an opinion.

And crucially, a recent [Survey Monkey poll](#) conducted for FiveThirtyEight showed that while 89 percent of core Trump supporters like how the president is handling health care, only 58 percent of "reluctant Trump supporters"<sup>1</sup> feel the same way. These reluctant voters put Trump over the top in the Electoral College in 2016 and will play a major role in determining the GOP's fortunes in 2018, and 40 percent of them disapprove of how Trump has handled health care.



But even if GOP voters aren't that jazzed about the push to repeal Obamacare, the party-as-organization groups, like the Club for Growth and Americans for Prosperity, are **deeply invested** in the effort. These groups provide **volunteers and supporters** for Republican causes and also spend **tens of millions of dollars** to either back GOP candidates or oppose Democratic ones in key races.

It may actually make political sense to push a health care bill that is broadly unpopular with the public but keeps party volunteers knocking on doors and donors giving money.

"Republicans need their most loyal supporters to turn out, and if they can't deliver on their promise to repeal Obamacare, it's going to be very hard to rally the troops," said **Lee Drutman**, a political scientist at New America, a D.C.-based think tank. "Core Republican voters are going to feel like, 'What's the point of even voting?'"

Drutman added, "Republicans understand that Democrats are going to be charged up regardless of whether or not they repeal Obamacare, because 'impeach Trump.'"

### **3. Ideology**

The current **GOP rhetoric** about Obamacare — that its markets in many states are collapsing and that therefore Republicans must enact a bill reforming the legislation and rescuing Americans who may be left without coverage — is **misleading**. While Trump and others in his party are eager to paint Obamacare as collapsing under its own weight, some insurance companies are publicly saying that one of **main reasons** they are abandoning the Obamacare marketplaces is that they are not sure that the Trump administration will take steps to support them. And the Republicans' AHCA bill includes cuts to Medicaid, which has nothing to do with the Obamacare marketplaces.

Many Republicans oppose Obamacare not because it is ineffective, but because it is effective in ways conservatives do not like. Enrollment in Medicaid has **boomed** under Obamacare. Many conservative **activists and politicians say** Medicaid should be available only to the poorest Americans, not a program that covers more than **70 million people**, as it does now.

The Republican health care bill, in some ways, redistributes how health care dollars are spent. Obamacare helps the poor by giving them **essentially free health care** via Medicaid, and it helps **older people** because it limits how much more they can be charged for health plans compared to younger people. In effect, under Obamacare, younger people's premiums help subsidize coverage for older people, who tend to **consume more** medical services. If you are **young, have a high income, or both**, the Republican bill could allow you to buy cheaper insurance. It allows insurers to charge younger people just **20 percent** of what they charge older customers and **provides tax credits** to some middle-class Americans who don't get much financial help through Obamacare.



#### 4. Annoying liberals

“Conservative politics is now less about ideas or accomplishments than it is about making the right enemies cry out in anguish,” wrote [Charles Sykes](#), a longtime conservative radio talk show host, in a recent New York Times op-ed titled “If Liberals Hate Him, Then Trump Must Be Doing Something Right.” (Sykes, who ended [his radio show in December](#) and is now a regular commentator on MSNBC, is anti-Trump and leery of conservatives who back the president.)

That is obviously a negative view of today’s Republican Party. But from 2009-16, one of the core organizing principles of the GOP was opposing Obama. And Trump has basked at times in reversing the policies of his predecessor, holding high-profile celebrations in the White House [Rose Garden](#) after the House passed the AHCA and when he announced that the U.S. was withdrawing from the [Paris climate change agreement](#). At the latter event, Trump also knocked liberal elites abroad, making sure to emphasize he was reversing Obama’s climate policies because he cared about people in “[Pittsburgh, not Paris](#).”

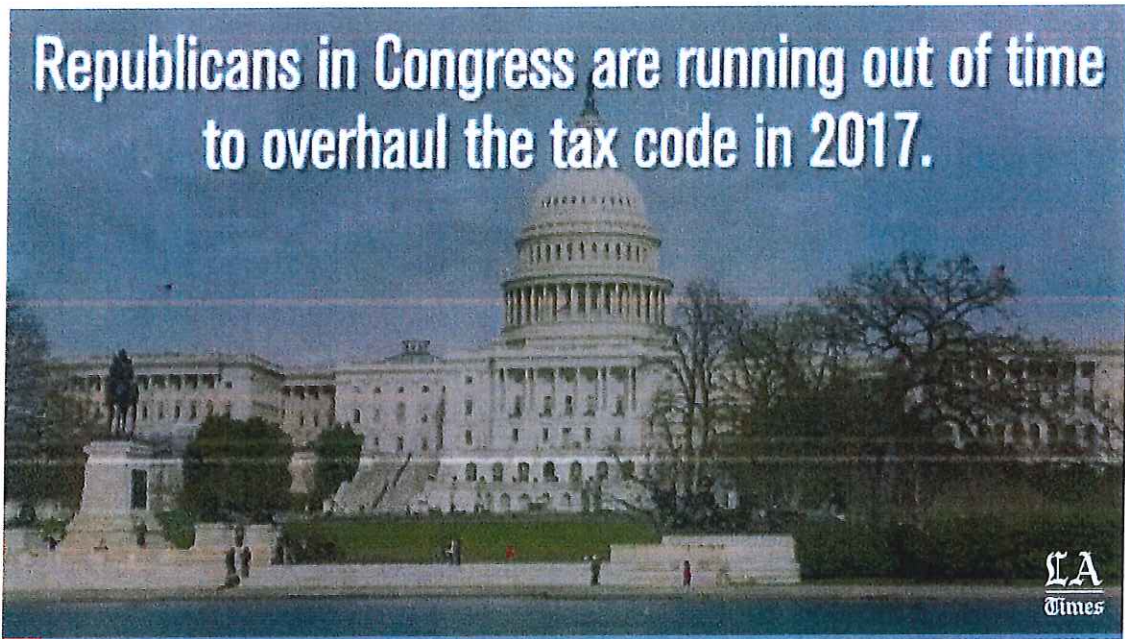
It’s hard to think of a policy more associated with Obama and today’s Democratic Party than the Affordable Care Act.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of reasons why Republicans want to repeal Obamacare. For example, one reason we didn’t touch on was that although the GOP is casting this bill as about health care, some experts argue [it’s really a stealthy way to cut taxes for the wealthy](#). (The legislation includes more than \$600 billion in tax cuts, including rolling back [both payroll and investment tax increases](#) for people who make more than \$200,000 a year.) This analysis is also not meant to suggest that these are good reasons, or even politically advantageous ones. Nor does it mean that health care reform will necessarily be adopted by Congress. Reasons 1 and 4 provide an argument that Republicans should adopt something that they can credibly tell conservative voters is a repeal of Obamacare — allowing them to keep their promises and annoy liberals by rolling back one of Obama’s major accomplishments — but that still leaves much of the law in place, thereby appealing to the majority of voters who don’t like the AHCA. But if the GOP took that route, the conservative activists and purists discussed in sections 2 and 3 might revolt, as they want to repeal as much of Obamacare as possible.

Those competing incentives that are making life difficult for the party at large are reflected more narrowly in what is happening right now in Washington, where Senate Republicans are trying to write a bill that will get 50 of the chamber’s 52 party members behind it. There is a divide between more moderate Republicans, like Alaska’s Lisa Murkowski, who [want to leave some of the Medicaid expansion in place](#), versus those like Utah’s Mike Lee, who favor a more [comprehensive repeal](#) of Obamacare. That kind of conservative-moderate divide is common on many bills, but on health care, there is also a divide between people like Lee and those like Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. It’s not clear that [Trump](#) or [McConnell](#) have clearly defined views on health care. So getting a bill through — but not a “[mean](#)” bill — would both accomplish a key party goal and potentially minimize the political fallout. In contrast, Lee has very specific [health policy goals](#). And he may prefer [no bill at all](#) to one that he ~~feels~~ does not repeal enough of Obamacare.



# As the legislative clock ticks, Ryan push to pass sweeping tax overhaul



House Speaker Paul D. Ryan on June 20 declared that he did not want to pass tax changes that would expire after 10 years.



By **Jim Puzzanghera** • Contact Reporter

JUNE 20, 2017, 12:45 PM | REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

**H**ouse Speaker **Paul D. Ryan** launched a major push Tuesday to overhaul the tax code this year — including massive cuts — but **Republicans in Congress** and the White House are running out of time as they continue to battle over the details.

With the year's legislative days dwindling, Ryan (R-Wis.) tried to jump-start the process with a major speech about what his staff described as the "crown jewel" of the Republican economic agenda.

"Once in a generation or so, there is an opportunity to do something absolutely transformational, something that will have a truly lasting impact long after you and I are gone," he told the National Assn. of Manufacturers. "That moment is here and we are going to meet it. Ladies and gentleman, we are going to fix this nation's tax code once and for all."

"We are going to get this done in 2017," he said. "We cannot let this once-in-a-generation moment slip by."

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Such a tax could raise \$1 trillion in revenue over 10 years. The money would help offset a sharp reduction in the 35% corporate tax rate.

But the business community is split on the border-adjustment tax. Major exporters support it. But retailers that import a lot of goods, such as [Wal-Mart Stores Inc.](#), oppose it. Senate Republican leaders and Trump administration officials are cool to the tax, which opponents argue would lead to higher prices for consumers as retailers pass on the cost of the tax to them.

David McIntosh, president of the Club for Growth, an influential conservative advocacy group, called the tax “a political loser.”

“Any member who campaigned on lower taxes should not even entertain the idea” of a border adjustment tax, McIntosh said Tuesday. He complained the Republican-controlled Congress “has made little progress towards cutting taxes.”

Mnuchin dodged a question on the border tax Tuesday during an appearance on CNBC. But he downplayed the obstacles to getting a tax overhaul enacted.

“We fundamentally agree on what the principles are and we’re working hard to get the details ironed out,” Mnuchin said.

Without the revenue from a border adjustment tax, it will be difficult to draft tax legislation that does not add to the budget deficit after 10 years.

If the plan adds to the deficit, Senate Republicans will need Democratic support to overcome a 60-vote threshold.

The other alternative would be to have the changes expire at the end of 10 years, which would allow Senate Republicans to pass the bill through a process known as reconciliation that requires only a simple majority.

The 2001 Bush tax cuts used that approach. In 2012, Congress allowed some of those cuts, for the highest earners, to expire.

Ryan on Tuesday declared that he did not want to pass tax changes that would expire after 10 years.

“These reforms, these tax cuts, they need to be permanent,” Ryan said.



Speaking before Ryan, Vice President **Mike Pence** made the same promise to the trade group. He downplayed the difficulty of negotiations between the Trump administration and House and **Senate** Republicans.

“Discussions will continue. Details are being worked out,” Pence told the manufacturers, who strongly support a tax overhaul. “But I can assure you, with your support and the support of our leaders in Congress, we will get tax cuts done and we will get them done this year.”

That’s a formidable task.

There still is no tax bill in the House or the Senate as disputes among Republicans remain unresolved, particularly whether to enact a controversial border tax. Treasury Secretary **Steven T. Mnuchin** already has **given up** on his earlier hopes to get legislation passed before Congress leaves for its August recess.

Ryan now is aiming to get legislation up for consideration this fall.

If that’s the case, then passing tax reform this year is “definitely doable,” said Michael Steel, a former House Republican leadership aide.

“Tax reform is always hard and that’s why we don’t do it very often, but it’s incredibly important and this is a tremendous opportunity,” said Steel, now a managing director at Hamilton Place Strategies, a public affairs consulting firm in Washington.

But in a tacit acknowledgement of the hurdles, Ryan did not wade into the policy disputes in Tuesday’s speech as he laid out broad principles that echoed those of the White House.

The Trump administration has **called for** slashing the corporate tax rate to 15% from 35%, and providing more favorable treatment for overseas earnings. Trump also wants to reduce the number of personal income tax brackets from seven to three, with rates of 10%, 25% and a top rate of 35%.

The House Republican blueprint that Ryan helped draft calls for a 20% corporate tax rate. He told CNBC after his speech that he’d love to cut the tax to 15% “if we can get the numbers to work.”

To help offset the cuts, the administration and House Republicans want to eliminate most deductions, including one for the payment of state and local taxes. Californians and residents of other states with high taxes and high earners would lose the most if that deduction disappears.

Republicans also want to eliminate the alternative minimum tax and the estate tax.

But the administration’s sketchy plan, contained on a single page with 19 bullet points released in April, still **lacks many basic details**, including income requirements for the new tax brackets and any analysis of how much it would increase the national debt.

The only detail to emerge in recent weeks is that rich Americans might fare better in the overhaul. Last week, Mnuchin publicly **backed off** of an earlier promise he made that the wealthy would not pay less in overall taxes because lower rates would be offset by fewer deductions.

There are a lot of similarities with the House Republican plan. But the biggest obstacle appears to be its push for a controversial **border-adjustment tax**, which would subject importers to higher taxes than exporters or those that produce products in the U.S. for domestic consumption.



# Freedom Caucus Sets Up Battle With Leadership Over Taxes

Conservatives seek to attach welfare cuts to tax overhaul in exchange for budget deal

Posted Jun 12, 2017

5:02 AM



Lindsey McPherson  
@Lindsey McPherson

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House GOP Undecided on Spending Path

Ryan, Pence Promise Tax Overhaul but Offer Few Details



The Freedom Caucus, led by Chairman Mark Meadows, outlined Friday its principles for a tax overhaul. (Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call File Photo)

House Republican leaders are negotiating a tax overhaul with their counterparts in the Senate and the White House, but another group of GOP lawmakers is signaling it too must be included in any deal.

House Freedom Caucus leaders are laying out their ideas for overhauling the tax code that, together with a [related proposal for getting a budget deal](#), is likely to set them up for a fight with GOP leaders and tax writers.

Most of the four “principles” for a tax overhaul that Freedom Caucus Chairman [Mark Meadows](#) and three other caucus members unveiled at a Heritage Foundation event Friday are not major deviations from the House GOP leaders’ framework though there are some notable differences.

But perhaps more striking were the ideas the Freedom Caucus members made clear they were not pushing — a revenue neutral bill and the inclusion of the border adjustment tax, both linchpins of leadership’s plan.

The caucus members also offered a wildcard idea of adding a welfare overhaul to the yet-unwritten reconciliation instructions for a tax rewrite, something they argue would perhaps convince them to accept a larger topline spending figure in the fiscal 2018 budget resolution.

Amid all of those ideas is an urgency to move quickly. “We should have a real proposal that we start debating before we leave at the end of July,” Meadows said. “But if not, we’ve already taken a formal position: We believe that we need to stay in through August until we get it done.”

The North Carolina Republican suggested that lawmakers move the ball closer to that goal post by agreeing to four principles within the next four weeks.

## Four principles

The Freedom Caucus’s four principles for a tax overhaul are:

- lower the tax rate for both corporations and small businesses to 20 percent;
- accelerate the time frame under which businesses can write off certain expenses;
- allow for a voluntary repatriation of offshore earnings over 20 months at a reduced tax rate of 8 percent,
- double the standard deduction for individuals.

House Republican leaders’ “A Better Way” plan does call for lowering the current 35 percent corporate tax rate to 20 percent but proposes a 25 percent rate for small business organized as passthrough companies, which are taxed at individual rates that currently top out at 39.6 percent.

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Leadership's plan would also allow businesses to write off the full cost of certain investments in the tax year that they're incurred — something the Freedom Caucus is open to with modifications to account for businesses that borrow money for investing rather than use cash — and nearly double the standard deduction for individuals.

The biggest gap between the two proposals is on repatriation of offshore earnings.

GOP leaders' plan would institute a mandatory tax on existing offshore earnings of 8.75 percent for cash assets and 3.5 percent for nonliquid assets. Unlike the Freedom Caucus proposal, which seeks to incentivize companies to bring offshore earnings back to the U.S. in exchange for a lower tax rate, leadership's plan would require U.S.-based companies to pay the repatriation tax regardless of whether they bring their offshore money home.

## No border tax

While the differences between the Freedom Caucus's four principles and leadership's framework are not minor, they could be worked through. But the red line the caucus has drawn against the border adjustment tax is more problematic for House leadership.

"There is **not consensus for the border adjustment tax**," Meadows said. "The sooner we acknowledge that and get on with a plan that actually works and actually can build consensus, the better off we'll be."

The border adjustment tax, or BAT, is a proposal to tax imports instead of exports, reversing the way the United States taxes goods crossing its borders. House GOP leaders, namely Speaker **Paul D. Ryan** of Wisconsin and Ways and Means Chairman **Kevin Brady** of Texas, have pushed for the tax as a way to discourage U.S. companies from moving operations overseas and to raise roughly \$1 trillion in revenue to partially offset an ambitious corporate tax rate cut. But the idea has faced steep opposition from within their own party — Meadows and others have argued, that it's politically unfeasible to pass.

"I think it's lost a lot of momentum," said Rep. **Warren Davidson**, a Freedom Caucus member. The Ohio Republican said he could actually live with the BAT as part of a larger tax overhaul but the problem is that leadership still has not offered a proposal on how to implement it.

Ryan and Brady have shown no interest in letting go of the BAT but say they're open to better ideas for raising revenue and preventing tax base erosion, which could be triggered by a flood of U.S. taxpayers, primarily businesses, moving to lower tax jurisdictions.

Even if Congress could cut the corporate rate from 35 percent to 20 percent, as House GOP leaders have proposed, or 15 percent, as President Donald Trump has called for, the United States would still have a higher tax rate than some other developed nations.

The Freedom Caucus members did not specify an alternative to the BAT for preventing tax base erosion, but they said the revenue is not needed because they don't adhere to the principle that an overhaul needs to be revenue neutral, which would require the same amount of tax money to continue flowing into the Treasury as under current law.

"What is not in those principles is this concept of revenue neutrality," said Ohio Rep. **Jim Jordan**, a caucus member and former chairman of the group. "Letting families keep more of their money is not a cost to government. It is a freedom."

## Temporary tax cuts?

Since Republicans are planning to use the budget reconciliation process to advance their tax bill, the measure must be deficit neutral for the tax overhaul to be considered permanent. GOP leaders say temporary tax cuts that would expire at the end of the 10-year budget window — like the George W. Bush tax cuts whose expiration led to the 2012-2013 fiscal cliff — is not an option, but the Freedom Caucus isn't ruling that out.

"Some of the tax cuts could be temporary so you don't need to get full deficit neutral, but we're hoping to get close to that," Jordan said.

An idea that Jordan proposed that could help achieve the needed savings is adding a welfare overhaul to the reconciliation instructions for the tax bill. The Freedom Caucus is looking at taking an official position, suggesting that as a possible trade-off to them supporting a budget deal with larger topline spending number for fiscal 2018, Jordan said.

"Right now a budget cannot pass in the House of Representatives," he said.

Absent a budget deal along those lines, House Republicans will struggle — like they did last year — to pass a budget resolution, Jordan said. House Republicans need to pass and reconcile a budget resolution with the Senate to execute the GOP's procedural strategy for advancing a tax overhaul. An agreement on the topline spending number is also needed for appropriators to begin moving fiscal 2018 spending bills.

"If someone can come up with a better idea than the one we're putting forward ... we're all ears," Jordan said. "But no one can. So we think that's the key in the short term to do all the things we promised the American people."

Meadows said Jordan's welfare overhaul plan would result in roughly \$400 billion in savings, and with that and the tax ideas the Freedom Caucus is discussing, a deficit neutral reconciliation bill is possible. "It should get us there," he said, noting, though, that temporary tax cuts represent a "fallback plan."

The divisions among House Republicans about how to approach a tax overhaul are complicated by the fact that GOP leaders are striving to come up with a single, unified plan that also has the support of the Senate and White House. The gaps among the Republican power structures are fairly wide.

"Right now on tax reform there's disagreement in the House, there's disagreement in the Senate, there's disagreement between the House and the Senate and there's disagreement with the administration," Texas Sen. **Ted Cruz** said at a Faith and Freedom Coalition conference in Washington on Thursday. "Other than that, we are all on the same page."





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# Congress again pushing U.S. to brink of financial calamity

BY DIANE SWONK, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR · 06/14/17 06:20 PM EDT

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Mixed messages from Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, pushback from members of the president's cabinet and Republicans in Congress have added to brinkmanship by Democrats to up the ante on another epic showdown over the debt ceiling. Extraordinary measures by the Treasury Department are **already being used to extend the deadline into September**, but Secretary Mnuchin has been frustratingly vague about when we actually face default.

The standoff poses a real risk that we could once again find ourselves on the verge of a U.S. Treasury default. The showdown in 2011 unnerved financial markets and resulted in the first downgrade in our country's credit in August 2011. Economic growth slowed to a standstill as uncertainty spiked. We ended up with across-the-board budget cuts, which eliminated fiscal stimulus at a critical time in the recovery. That shifted more of the burden of supporting the economy onto the Federal Reserve, which has few tools.



Worse yet, those contractionary moves did nothing to rein in ballooning deficits over the medium term, which was the stated goal. The cuts did not address the elephant in the room: spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid benefits, which are already rising at a faster pace as baby boomers age into retirement.

The irony is that the debt ceiling was initially designed to facilitate rather than constrain the Treasury's flexibility to issue debt. Congress gave President Woodrow Wilson the ability to issue bonds as needed to fund World War I. Though the debt ceiling has undergone many iterations, it remains critical to Treasury's financing government commitments that have already been approved. It does not include new spending initiatives; thus, holding the debt ceiling hostage does nothing to align spending with revenues.

Failing to raise the debt ceiling would force the Treasury to stop making interest payments on our debt, including all bonds and bills. That would mean breaking the contract with all holders of U.S. Treasuries, which would be akin to a large number of Americans defaulting on all of their debt obligations simultaneously. It would make the mortgage defaults during the housing crisis look small in comparison.

Interest rates would spike as the world would lose faith in the U.S. as a safe haven. The value of the dollar would plummet. Government spending would contract, threatening retirees dependent on Social Security. A financial crisis would erupt and push the U.S. economy into recession or worse, a protracted depression.

The downside risks from a failure to lift the debt ceiling actually embolden politicians to grandstand and take the debt ceiling vote hostage. It is a way for extremists in both parties to push their agendas, particularly during the height of 2018 budget negotiations, regardless of the risks.

Making matters worse, the administration has voiced some support for obstructionist tactics and a government shutdown. Treasury Secretary Mnuchin recently waffled on his position by suggesting there is such a thing as a "good shutdown." White House Budget Director Mick Mulvaney, who helped lead the charge to hold the debt ceiling hostage in 2011, has voiced a similar view.

So far, investors have turned a deaf ear to this noise from Washington. It's hard to blame them given how many times this game has been played. If and when we reach the edge of the cliff, markets will react. That scenario would underscore the low probability of achieving a pro-growth agenda, which would represent another wake-up call to investors.

What could bridge an impasse over the debt ceiling? I find myself longing for an evening like last November when a rain delay allowed the Cubs to hit the reset button, pull together as a team and win the World Series. I guess it is asking too much for politicians to act as a team when they are looking for their next election victory.

Their focus is so short-term that they can't agree within each party, let alone across party lines. That won't stop me wishing for another miracle of politicians putting the economy first for a change.


*Diane Swonk is the founder and CEO of DS Economics, an economic consulting firm. Prior to that, she spent more than 30 years in the financial services industry. As a well-known macroeconomist, she advises the Federal Reserve Board and its regional banks. She also served two terms on the economic advisory board to the Congressional Budget Office. She has been named a fellow by the National Association for Business Economics (NABE) for outstanding contributions to the field. Follow her on Twitter @DianeSwonk.*



# Senate GOP plans July debt ceiling vote

But House Republicans aren't showing their hand yet.

By BURGESS EVERETT, RACHAEL BADE and JOHN BRESNAHAN |  
06/20/2017 12:12 PM EDT | Updated 06/20/2017 06:59 PM EDT

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Senate Republicans are planning for a July vote to raise the debt ceiling, according to senators and aides.

But House Republicans aren't prepared to show their hand yet, although they also hope to resolve the issue before the August recess begins. Yet with a possible health care vote in July — if the Senate passes a bill — top House Republicans are worried that the two issues could become entangled politically, making two already difficult votes even tougher.



Though the Treasury Department has said Congress can likely wait until September to avoid default, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and his lieutenants are increasingly disposed to clearing the Senate's plate as much as possible before heading home for August recess. That would also likely mean decoupling the debt ceiling from a potential government shutdown fight in September.

It's not clear what exactly such a bill would look like, but members of both parties are interested in a broad spending deal that would avoid the blunt budget cuts of sequestration. A "clean" debt ceiling increase — one with no policy strings or cuts attached — might be a problem for a GOP majority filled with fiscal conservatives.

There is also an emerging consensus among Hill leaders that the debt ceiling — currently \$20 trillion — should be raised by an amount large enough to preclude another vote for several years. This would make it politically dicey for fiscal conservatives, yet it would be easier for most rank-and-file lawmakers to just have one vote this Congress.

"I'd like to see that done earlier," said Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn of Texas when asked about lifting the debt ceiling in September. "I'm hoping there will be a negotiation on spending caps. Maybe it will be part of that."



On Monday, Republican Senate staffers were provided new schedule guidance laying out that the preferred debt deadline is before the August break.

In the House, GOP leaders have not formally settled on a plan to raise the debt ceiling, according to multiple sources. The topic, which is toxic for many in the more right-leaning chamber, is expected to be discussed Wednesday morning during a GOP Conference meeting on the budget and appropriations process.

Conservatives in the House Freedom Caucus have called for spending cuts to accompany any increase in the nation's borrowing limit, and more than a few GOP leadership allies have bristled at the idea of doing a clean debt ceiling increase, as Democrats have demanded in previous years.

But GOP leaders in the House are eyeing what's feasible in the chamber across Capitol Hill. And since Senate Democrats will never go for spending cuts, the idea will likely remain a far-off hard-liner dream.

There may be some rank-and-file support among House Republicans to piece together a bipartisan budget deal to raise spending caps, as is being discussed in the Senate. More than 141 defense-minded House Republicans signed a letter in early May asking GOP leaders to raise the cap on the Pentagon budget.

Senate Democrats would be loath to support a military boost without increases for domestic programs as well. Some GOP defense hawks may be willing to negotiate to do both. It's unclear, however, whether they would want to link that to a debt ceiling vote.



# Trump's Cabinet takes beating on budget plan

BY NIV ELIS - 06/21/17 06:00 AM EDT

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Trump administration officials are taking a beating on Capitol Hill over the president's budget request.

In hearing after hearing, Cabinet officials are absorbing heavy fire — much of it from Republicans.

Rep. Hal Rogers (R-Ky.), a former chairman of the Appropriations panel, told Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke at a June 8 hearing that he was "flabbergasted" by a budget proposal to end a workforce redevelopment pilot program designed to help coal workers.

"Not all of these decisions we will agree on, but this is what a balanced budget looks like," Zinke replied, defending the 13 percent cut to the Interior Department.

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Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) listed a series of strategic challenges that would be exacerbated by cuts to the State Department totaling nearly 30 percent.

"I think this budget request is in many ways radical and reckless when it comes to soft power," Graham told Secretary of State Rex Tillerson at a June 13 hearing.

Tillerson replied, somewhat awkwardly, that State's funding was not all that important to achieving its goals.

"I have never believed, or experienced, that the level of funding devoted to a goal is the most important factor in achieving it," he said.

He said State was looking for nongovernment actors to make up for programs that would be cut or eliminated by Trump's budget.

It's far from unusual for Cabinet members to take fire for defending cuts in a presidential budget.

Officials from administrations in both parties expect to take partisan lumps as part of the process, and it's not uncommon for members of the president's own party to question cuts that might affect their districts.

It's the size of the cuts in Trump's budget that are unusual, as are the volume of complaints from Republicans.

"You have a situation where the agencies are really saying they wouldn't mind if they received more money than they asked for. It's this kabuki dance," said budget expert Stan Collender, executive vice president at the MSL group.

To pay for \$54 billion in defense increases, Trump proposed cutting the same amount from nondefense discretionary programs, which comprise almost every other federal agency.

The budget also proposed additional cuts from mandatory spending programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and disability insurance.



"In this case, you have additional problems because the cuts are so severe on the domestic side," Collender said.

Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin actually denounced a proposed \$3 billion cut to Individual Unemployability, a cut that would pull additional disability benefits from roughly 200,000 veterans.

"We have budget numbers and targets that we have to hit, but we shouldn't be doing things that are going to be hurting veterans that can't afford to lose these benefits," Shulkin told Sen. [Dean Heller \(R-Nev.\)](#) at a June 15 hearing.

Most of the cuts being defended by Trump's Cabinet have zero chance of making it through Congress.

"The president's budget is, at the end of the day, a messaging document," Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said to reporters last week.

But they have little choice but to offer some kind of defense.

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson told Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) that community development funds cut from his agency's budget could be made up in an infrastructure bill that the administration is pursuing.

"Well, certainly we have been advocating for housing to be included in the infrastructure bill, and things do seem to be moving in that direction," Carson said at a June 9 House Appropriations subcommittee hearing.

Yet there have been no indications that portions of the block grant program would be rekindled under the Transportation Department or in an infrastructure bill.

Carson also made the mistake of praising the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness as "effective." It was eliminated in the budget proposal.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross described the Economic Development Administration, also eliminated in the Trump budget, as an effective program before falling back on the argument that "tough decisions" led to it being extinguished.

"I think they have been an effective program, but there is a limited amount of funding to go around, and one has to make unpleasant and difficult choices, and this was one of the more unpleasant and difficult ones," he told Sen. [Shelley Moore Capito \(R-W.Va.\)](#) at a June 8 hearing.

Some Cabinet members have acknowledged reservations about the cuts.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt argued in a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing on June 15 that the 30 percent cut to the agency's roughly \$8 billion budget was not necessarily carried out the way he would have wanted.

Rep. Ken Calvert (R-Calif.), the subcommittee's chairman, scolded him, saying, "In many instances, the budget proposes to significantly reduce or terminate programs that are vitally important to each member on this subcommittee.

"This is perhaps not how you personally would craft the EPA's budget, but it's the budget you have to defend here today," he later added.

Pruitt's defense: "This is our approach presently, but we look forward to your input on how, maybe, this can be restored and/or addressed in a different way."

Despite the discomfort the proposal may have caused administration officials, the budget has served as an anchor for budget talks.

Its chief proposal, to cut domestic discretionary spending by \$54 billion and increase defense spending by an equal amount, is at the center of budget talks in the House and Senate.

Yet even here, it's not clear that Trump will get what he wants. Some Republican lawmakers want to expand defense spending by more than the \$54 billion proposed by Trump.

June 12, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor-HHS-Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor-HHS-Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor-HHS-Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor-HHS-Education and Related Agencies  
U.S. House of Representatives

Chairmen Blunt and Cole, Ranking Members Murray and DeLauro:

The undersigned organizations urge you to reject the Administration's Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposal to eliminate funding for Impact Aid Federal Properties.

When Impact Aid was created in 1950, the federal government accepted the responsibility of a citizen, a business owner, or a landlord in helping to finance public education – in areas with a federal presence. Today, Impact Aid provides critical funding to over 1,200 public school districts nationwide that educate military children, children residing on Indian lands, children living in federal low-rent housing facilities, children of civilian employees of the federal government, and the children in school districts with significant tax-exempt federal property.

The budget request recommends the elimination of funding for Impact Aid (Title VII), Section 7002 (Federal Properties) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Currently, this \$68 million line item provides funding to over 200 school districts in 29 states as a replacement for the lost local revenue caused by the federal presence. Each of these school districts is unique – eligible property includes national parks, grasslands and laboratories, Army Corps of Engineers projects, and both the Air Force and West Point Military Academies – however, they all face the same financial challenge: a loss of taxable property and, as a result, a loss of local revenue, but just as many students to educate. In some communities, the federal government is the largest landowner; many federal property school districts are small and in rural areas.

Funding must be maintained for the benefit of all students in these districts. Cuts would cause financial harm as Impact Aid supports personnel and professional development, academic materials, transportation, technology, and other general operating expenses. Elimination of this funding stream would be a reversal on a 68-year commitment to federally impacted communities. We urge you to continue funding Impact Aid Federal Properties.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association  
Air Force Sergeants Association  
Air Force Women Officers Associated  
American Association of Classified School Employees  
American Counseling Association  
American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Federation of School Administrators



American Federation of Teachers  
 American Library Association  
 American School Counselor Association  
 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
 Arizona State Impact Aid Association  
 Association for Career and Technical Education  
 Association of Educational Service Agencies  
 Association of School Business Officials International  
 Association of the United States Army  
 Association of the United States Navy  
 California Association of Federally Impacted Schools  
 California School Employees Association  
 Chief Warrant & Warrant Officers Association, U.S. Coast Guard  
 Clearinghouse on Women's Issues  
 Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service  
 Council of the Great City Schools  
 Easterseals  
 FED ED  
 Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association (Section 7002)  
 First Focus Campaign for Children  
 Fleet Reserve Association  
 Impact Schools of South Dakota  
 Indian Impact Schools of Montana  
 Jewish War Veterans of the USA  
 Learning Disabilities Association of America  
 Magnet Schools of America  
 Mid-to-Low LOT Schools  
 Military Chaplains Association  
 Military Child Education Coalition  
 Military Impacted Schools Association  
 Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)  
 National Association of Counties (NACo)  
 National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)  
 National Association of Federally Impacted Schools  
 National Association of School Psychologists  
 National Association of Secondary School Principals  
 National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)  
 National Coalition of Classified Education Support Employee Unions (NCCSEU)  
 National Congress of American Indians  
 National Council for Impacted Schools  
 National Education Association  
 National Indian Education Association  
 National Indian Impacted Schools Association  
 National Military Family Association  
 National PTA  
 National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium  
 National Rural Education Association  
 National School Boards Association  
 National Superintendents Roundtable  
 National Title I Association  
 Naval Enlisted Reserve Association  
 Oklahoma Association Serving Impacted Schools  
 Organizations Concerned about Rural Education  
 Rebuild America's Schools  
 Rural School and Community Trust  
 Save the Children  
 School Social Work Association of America  
 Service Women's Action Network  
 Texas Association of Federally Impacted Schools  
 Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)  
 U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association  
 United States Army Warrant Officers Association  
 Washington State Impact Aid Association

Cc:  
 Senate Impact Aid Coalition  
 House Impact Aid Coalition

# As Trump pushes school choice, Heritage wants to let 800K military kids use public dollars for private education

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By Emma Brown June 2

The conservative Heritage Foundation is pushing to allow 800,000 military children to use federal tax dollars for private education, a proposal that comes as President Trump seeks to make good on his promise to dramatically expand school choice nationwide.

Under the Heritage proposal, military children would be able to elect to leave their public schools and instead receive a lump sum — an “education savings account” — that they could put toward private school tuition, tutoring or online school.

The proposal would require redirecting money from \$1.3 billion in “impact aid” funds that currently go to support public school districts near military bases and tribal lands, spending that has enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress. But Lindsey Burke, an education policy analyst at Heritage, argues that it is a way to support military families — a matter of national defense, she said — and would dramatically expand the universe of private-school choice.

Nearly 450,000 children use public funds to pay for private education nationwide. Heritage would like to see all 800,000 school-age children of active-duty families eligible for the same, including in states that don’t allow private-school choice. About 750,000 of those children attend Defense Department-run schools on base or local



public schools off base, according to a policy brief the foundation published Friday. “That’s a lot of kids,” Burke said.

The foundation also supports extending education savings accounts to tribal children, but that’s not the focus of the new policy.

Heritage has played a key role in shaping Trump administration policy ideas — including the president’s proposed budget, which would slash discretionary spending for science, education and other social services. A spokeswoman for Education Secretary Betsy DeVos did not respond to a request for comment.

Whatever the administration’s position, it is not clear whether there is an appetite in Congress to create a new private-school choice program, particularly one that would come at the expense of local school districts.

Congress created impact aid funds to compensate public schools for the cost of operating in areas with a lot of military or tribal property — which cannot be taxed, and therefore provide no revenue to schools. More than 1,200 districts receive some share of the money; some of them, particularly in tribal areas, rely heavily on impact aid funds to operate. Lawmakers have repeatedly denied requests from both the Obama and Trump administrations to reduce impact aid spending; senators and representatives from both sides of the aisle signed letters this spring calling the money “the very lifeblood” that allows some districts to operate.

Hilary Goldmann, executive director of the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools, said that turning impact aid into a voucher or education savings account program “completely misses the point.” It’s a tax-fairness initiative, she said, and is meant to “serve all the children in the district — not a certain subset.”

Burke disagrees, arguing that the program was always meant to pay for the education of military and tribal children. But it’s not clear whether military families even want this option — particularly given the lump sums they would receive under the Heritage proposal, as little as \$4,607 for a student who leaves a public school in a state without its own choice program. Burke said that Heritage is planning to survey military families this summer in



## Position Statement: Title III of the CHOICE Act (115<sup>th</sup> Congress)

**ISSUE:** Title III of S. 235, the “Creating Hope and Opportunity for Individuals and Communities through Education” (CHOICE) Act, establishes a voucher program for the children of military personnel who live on military installations. The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS) and the Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA) oppose this legislation.

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION:**

- Supporting military families is a top priority for our school districts and they are well-equipped to meet their students’ needs. Public schools with experience educating children of military personnel understand their unique challenges, particularly related to parental deployment and mobility. School districts with significant numbers of military-dependents offer the academic and emotional supports necessary to support this unique population, including educational programs, counseling, and other programs specifically designed for military students. Schools educating a few military-connected students may not be well-equipped to provide similar services, including peer support.
- Military children will, on average, attend between six and nine schools from grades K-12.<sup>1</sup> The high mobility rate of this population makes the implementation of a voucher impractical for both students and school districts. The legislation does not specify whether the family or the school district has authority over the funds, whether the funds are disbursed in a lump sum or on a daily basis, or how unused portions of the voucher would be credited when the family moves. The tracking and accountability of funds would be cumbersome, particularly for students moving mid-school year.
- The Impact Aid program provides funding to public school districts based on the number of military-connected children enrolled, those living on and off the installation. Reducing these funds as a result of students leaving to participate in a voucher program could reduce the ability of public schools to provide a high-quality education to the students they serve.
- Families already have the option to homeschool or choose an alternative school for their children, whether or not they reside on or off a military installation. Additionally, the Impact Aid program is significantly underfunded. The Federal government should not create a new program, at the expense of taxpayers, when funding for current obligations, including Impact Aid, is not being met.
- The Military Interstate Children’s Compact is an agreement among the 50 states that “addresses key educational transition issues encountered by military families including enrollment, placement, attendance, eligibility and graduation.”<sup>2</sup> Students leaving their assigned school to attend a private school with this voucher would not necessarily be covered by the provisions of the Compact, since it applies only to public schools.

<sup>1</sup> National Military Family Association: <http://www.militaryfamily.org/get-info/military-kids/education/>

<sup>2</sup> Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission: <http://mic3.net/pages/About/about.aspx>



# Voucher & Voucher Spinoff Talking Points

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## **DON'T:**

- Most importantly, please **do not repeat language referring to these programs as “choice”**, even placing a “so-called” modifier in front of it does us harm. It is best to avoid the word altogether.
- Whenever confronted with a euphemism for voucher, insist on calling it a voucher—make as many links back to the word voucher as possible. These euphemisms are often called “tuition tax credits,” “ESAs,” or even “opportunity scholarships.”
- Don’t repeat negative language, especially any language that seeks to label schools as failing. Instead, revert to talking about what schools need to be successful.

## **DO: Emphasize the cost of taking scarce resources from neighborhood public schools.**

- ▶ We have a responsibility to provide great public schools for every student in America. Improving public schools requires more money, not less, and public money should only be used to help public schools.
- ▶ A child's opportunity for success should not be left to chance, betting on receiving a private school voucher or even being able to afford tuition if you get one is a risky proposition with no assurances. What every child needs is a quality, well-equipped school right in his neighborhood where he can learn, be inspired, and thrive.
- ▶ **Vouchers take scarce funding away** from public schools and give it to private schools that are unaccountable to the public.
- ▶ We should focus on investing public schools, where 90 percent of children go, not diverting money from them for the 10 percent who go to private schools.
- ▶ Vouchers only weaken our public schools, and even with vouchers, most parents still wouldn’t have the money to pay for private schools.

## **DO: Emphasize that there are higher priorities for improving public schools.**

- ▶ If we’re serious about every child’s future, let’s get serious about doing what works. This means resourcing our neighborhood public schools so that students have inviting classrooms, a well-rounded curriculum, class sizes that are small enough for one-on-one attention, and support services such as health care, nutrition, and after-school programs for students who need them.
- ▶ There are many, proven ways to improve schools, such as reducing class sizes so that teachers can provide more one-on-one attention, offering a well-rounded curriculum, and increasing parental involvement. That’s how taxpayer funds should be spent.
- ▶ Resourced neighborhood public schools that are desirable places to be and to learn, where students’ natural curiosity is inspired, are our best bet for setting every student in America off toward a great future.
- ▶ Take a look at our best public schools and here’s what you’ll see: [a band; teachers who are certified to teach physics and calculus; counselors to help students make life-altering choices; caring and supportive staff who welcome families into the school; theater class; girls’ volleyball; a chemistry lab; classes that offer college credit; debate; robotics, foreign languages; music;] and much more. Rather than vouchers, we should support these programs because they unlock students’ potential and cultivate a lifelong love of learning.

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## **For Progressive Groups and Communities of Color**

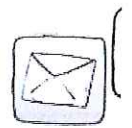
### **DO: Emphasize how vouchers harm opportunity.**

- ▶ Every student deserves a well-rounded curriculum that will nurture his imagination and desire to learn. Spending money on voucher programs means denying students the opportunities they deserve in their neighborhood public schools.

May 16 2017



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## Equity Alliance Blog

Mar 2,  
2017

### [The purported failure of America's schools, and ways to make them better by David C. Berliner](#)

Viewed by: 809 people [Comments \(3\)](#) Category: [Discussions](#)



DAVID C. BERLINER, Regents' Professor of Education Emeritus at Arizona State University, has also taught at many other universities at home and abroad. He is a member of the National Academy of Education, the International Academy of Education, and a past president of both the American Educational Research Association and the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association. He has won numerous awards for his work on behalf of the education profession, and authored or co-authored over 400 articles, chapters and books. Among his best known works are the six editions of the text *Educational Psychology*, co-authored with N. L. Gage; *The Manufactured Crisis*, co-authored with B. J. Biddle; *Collateral Damage: How high-Stakes Testing Corrupts American Education*, co-authored with Sharon Nichols; and *50 Myths and Lies that Threaten America's Public Schools*, co-authored with Gene V Glass. He co-edited the first *Handbook of Educational Psychology* and the books *Talks to Teachers*, *Perspectives on Instructional Time*, and *Putting Research to Work in Your School*. He has interest in the study of teaching, teacher education, and educational policy.

#### The purported failure of America's Schools, and ways to make them better

For many years I have been writing about the lies told about the poor performance of our students and the failure of our schools and teachers. Journalists and politicians are often our nations' most irritating commentators about the state of American education because they have access to the same facts that I have. They all can easily learn that the international tests (e. g. PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS), the national tests (e. g. NAEP), the college entrance tests (e. g. SAT, ACT), and each of the individual state tests follow an identical pattern. It is this: As income increases per family from our poorest families (under the 25th percentile in wealth), to working class (26th-50th percentile in family wealth), to middle class (51st to 75th percentile in family wealth), to wealthy (the highest quartile in family wealth), mean scores go up quite substantially. In every standardized achievement test whose scores we use to judge the quality of the education received by our children, family income strongly and significantly influences the mean scores obtained.

Similarly, as the families served by a school increase in wealth from the lowest quartile in family wealth to the highest quartile in family wealth, the mean scores of all the students at those schools goes up quite substantially. Thus, characteristics of the cohort attending a school strongly influence the scores obtained by the students at that school.

For example, on the mathematics portion of the 2012 [Programme for International Student Assessment](#) (PISA) to test, poor students (among those from lowest quartile in family income), who attended schools that served the poorest families (a school in the highest quartile of those receiving free and reduced lunch), attained a mean score of 425. But wealthy students (in the highest quartile of family income), who attended schools that served the wealthiest families (schools in the lowest quartile of students receiving free and reduced lunch), scored a mean of 528. That's a one-hundred point difference!

Since US scores on PISA were stable from 2012 to 2015, we can also use these scores from 2012 to approximate where wealthy and poor American students rank on the latest administration of PISA. On the 2015 mathematics scale, the difference between scores of 528 and 425 is the difference between our nation being ranked about 7th in the world, or being ranked about 50th!

So what does this teach us? We learn that in the US, wealthy children attending public schools that serve the wealthy are competitive with any nation in the world. Since that is the case why would anyone think our public schools are failing?

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When compared to other nations *some* of our students and some of our public schools are not doing well. But having “some” failures is quite a different claim than one indicting our entire public school system. Furthermore, in the schools in which low-income students do not achieve well, we find the common correlates of poverty: low birth weight in the neighborhood, higher than average rates of teen and single parenthood, residential mobility, absenteeism, crime, and students in need of special education or English language instruction. These problems of poverty influence education and are magnified by housing policies that foster segregation. Over the years, in many communities, wealthier citizens and government policies have managed to consign low-income students to something akin to a lower caste. The wealthy have cordoned off their wealth. They hide behind school district boundaries that they often draw themselves, and when they do so, they proudly use a phrase we all applaud, “Local Control!” The result, by design, is schools segregated by social class, and that also means segregation by race and ethnicity. We have created an apartheid-lite, separate and unequal, system of education.

So “fixing” the schools, about which so many of our editorialists and political leaders talk, needs deeper thinking than a knee-jerk reaction to our mean score on any international test. That mean score hides the diversity of our scores by social class and housing tract, and easily misleads us about what solutions might exist. When our leaders say teachers are not good, we need to point out to them how well some of our students are doing, and that a recent [Mathematica](#) report for the U.S. Department of Education states that the quality of teachers working in low-income schools is about the same as the quality of teachers working in high income schools. So blaming teachers won't fix schools that need fixing!

Likewise, some think our terrible curriculum was to blame for the low mean performance of our students. Thus, in recent years, those critics created the “rigorous” Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Yet with that allegedly lousy curriculum, wealthy children in public schools that serve wealthy families were easily competitive with the highest scoring nations in the world. In each state, higher income students use essentially the same curriculum as lower income students. But the higher income students succeeded admirably. So how then can the curriculum be bad? Blaming the curriculum for our purported failures is as illogical as blaming the teachers.

What might work to produce higher achievement for low-income children attending schools that serve low-income families? High quality early childhood experiences; summer school to address summer loss; parent education programs to build skills needed in school; parent housing vouchers to reduce mobility; after school programs such as sports, chess clubs, and robotics; a full array of AP courses; school counselors and school nurses at the ratios their professions recommend; professional development for teachers and establishment of school cultures of professionalism; pay for teachers at parity with what others at similar educational levels receive; and so forth.

Of course, this will all cost money. But most of what is expended by the state will be returned in the form of taxes paid by a higher-skilled work force, lower rates of special education and incarceration, lower health care costs, and other positive economic outcomes associated with the programs I just listed.

What I have suggested for ameliorating the low performance of low-income children, on all our assessments, are characteristics of child-rearing and schooling now present in wealthier communities. Perhaps, then, we should rely on John Dewey to help low-income students succeed, instead of putting our faith in vouchers, charters, test preparation, teacher accountability and the like. To paraphrase just a little, Dewey said: *“What the best and wisest (among the wealthiest) parents want for their children, that must we want for all the children of the community. Anything less is unlovely, and left unchecked, destroys our democracy.”*

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## Comments

3 Responses to “The purported failure of America’s schools, and ways to make them better by David C. Berliner”

1. W. James Popham on 3/3/17 1:55 PM US/Eastern

No one understands the quality of American schooling as well as Professor Berliner, nor writes as clearly and constructively about this issue than he does. In this essay, his collection of suggested amelioration steps provides us with a wonderful set of “must-do” activities.

2. [James Harvey](#) on 3/3/17 2:05 PM US/Eastern

Excellent commentary, Dave. Many thanks.

3. [Patrick Walsh](#) on 3/3/17 9:09 PM US/Eastern

Thank you so much, David. Always an inspiration to hear your brilliant voice. I will share this as widely as I can.

Leave a Reply

Name (required)



## Politics

# Report Shows 'Untapped Power' of Constituent Advocacy

Showing the local effects of legislation can better influence lawmakers



People react to Rep. Jason Chaffetz as he speaks during a town hall meeting at Brighton High School, Thursday, Feb. 9, 2017, in Cottonwood Heights, Utah. Hundreds of people lined up early for the town hall with Chaffetz on Thursday evening, many holding signs criticizing the congressman's push to repeal the newly-named Bears Ears National Monument in southern Utah. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)



**Bridget Bowman**  
@Bridget Bowman

Posted Feb 13, 2017 11:43 AM



Citizens from across the country have jammed the Senate phone lines in recent weeks, making their voices heard on President Donald Trump's Cabinet appointments. But a new report suggests there are more effective ways to influence legislators.

The Congressional Management Foundation on Monday [released a new report](#), entitled "Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement," that highlights more than a decade's worth of its surveys that show how citizens can best influence lawmakers. According to the group's research, citizens who show up in person and are well-prepared with facts and arguments can have a sizable impact on undecided legislators.

"Unfortunately, most Americans believe their voices don't make a difference. This research proves that their voices do make a difference, and they can magnify their voices by using more effective advocacy techniques," wrote the report's authors, Bradford Fitch and Kathy Goldschmidt, both of the CMF.

Between August 2004 and July 2016, the foundation conducted nine surveys of congressional staff and four surveys of citizen advocates, generating more than 1,200 responses.



Its findings showed that direct interactions between lawmakers and staff can have a profound impact. In 2004, 2010, and 2015, more than 90 percent of congressional staffers said that in-person constituent visits could influence a lawmaker, especially one who is undecided on an issue.

The report highlighted the effect of direct meetings between lawmakers and staffers and constituents. But recent flare-ups at town hall meetings across the country have also demonstrated the impact of constituents who show up and make their voices heard.

For instance, last week, House Oversight and Government Reform Chairman [Jason Chaffetz](#) faced a [packed auditorium of protesters](#) in Utah who questioned why the Republican congressman was not investigating the president's potential ethical violations.

Videos of town hall meetings from other parts of the country have also sprung up with constituents confronting GOP lawmakers about their plans to do away with the 2010 health care law, and what will happen if Republicans in Congress repeal sizable portions of the law.

#### [\[Sensenbrenner Admonishes Crowd to be Respectful\]](#)

The confrontations at town hall meetings can lead to tense exchanges. Over the weekend, Wisconsin Republican Rep. [Jim Sensenbrenner](#) told a constituent who interrupted another to “wait your turn.”

Chaffetz, who left his town hall after being shouted down, later dismissed the protesters. In an [interview with the Desert News](#), Chaffetz said they were brought in from elsewhere and were “more of a paid attempt to bully and intimidate.” Some Republican congressmen, like [John J. Duncan Jr.](#) of Tennessee and [Chris Collins](#) of New York, have written off having town hall meetings entirely.

#### [\[Chaffetz Hears Jeers and Cheers at Town Hall\]](#)

This kind of interaction over Cabinet nominations during town hall meetings is not typical, said Fitch, the president of the Congressional Management Foundation. He said congressional engagement is usually facilitated by an advocacy organization that encourages its members to contact lawmakers about a specific bill.

But Fitch said phone calls and emails are not necessarily the most effective ways of communicating with legislators — and neither is a confrontation.

“When you're yelling, Congress isn't listening,” he said.

To have a productive meeting with lawmakers and staff, the CMF report noted the benefits of coming prepared.

For instance, 91 percent of staffers said including information about the local impact of legislation was helpful, but only 9 percent said constituents frequently included this information during discussions.

Surveys of staffers also found that it is important for constituents to include their own reasons for supporting or opposing a piece of legislation, a specific request for the lawmaker, and a personal story relating to the legislation.

Having a specific request is key to how groups could harness the current energy that has citizens jamming the Senate phone lines and crowding constituent meetings.

“What we'll have to see are specific proposals that members of Congress will have to make choices on and that citizens can hold legislators accountable on,” Fitch said. “That, all of our research shows, is another component of great advocacy — that there is a specific ask.”

Fitch said groups could also look to foster more sustained engagement with lawmakers

He cited a case study, noted in Monday's report, in which the foundation partnered with Feeding America, a national food bank network, to train constituents on how to engage with lawmakers and their staff. Those people became trustworthy sources for staffers.

“It wasn't by yelling. It was by preparing, it was by studying. It was by learning about the member of Congress,” Fitch said. “It was calmly and politely and persistently interacting with them on a regular basis over a period of years.”

The report's authors also encouraged advocacy groups to include citizens in their lobbying efforts. They recommended that groups develop metrics to measure their relationship-building efforts, and take time to teach citizens how to be more effective advocates.