

## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020

*Due to looming elections, Congress was not in session for much of October. Since the elections, Senate leadership has continued to focus on confirming judges and refused to take up COVID-19 stimulus and relief legislation passed by the House. Before adjourning for good at year's end, the 116th Congress is expected to act on must-pass spending measures—to fund the military and keep the government running—but not much else.*

### COVID-19

On Oct. 21, NEA urged senators to [oppose the amended S. 178](#), coronavirus legislation brought forward by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY). “The bill does not do nearly enough to protect the health and financial stability of families; does not provide the resources and approach necessary for public K-12 schools and colleges and universities to conduct in-person learning safely or to educate students effectively remotely; and does nothing to stabilize state and local governments and protect critical public services,” NEA said.

Eighteen leading education organizations, including NEA, urged Congress to provide coronavirus relief in a [statement issued Nov. 16](#). “At a time when the nation agrees on very little, everyone agrees on the importance of ensuring all of our students have what they need to learn during this pandemic, and helping schools open—and stay open—safely for staff and students. This important work is dependent upon federal support. Congress must act now to provide aid to states and schools during the lame duck period. Educators, students and communities cannot wait any longer.”

NEA joined a [Nov. 20 sign-on letter](#) from 60 education and related organizations urging Congress to “include in an emergency COVID-19 package the provisions in the HEROES Act 2.0 (H.R. 925) that would establish an ‘Emergency Connectivity Fund’ to provide \$12 billion to schools and libraries to ensure that students and educators have Internet access from home and appropriate connectivity devices...” As many as 16 million students—roughly 1 in 3—are unable to do schoolwork at home due to lack of internet access and devices. A disproportionate share of those students are Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and live in rural areas or low-income households.

### HIGHER EDUCATION

NEA was among the 77 organizations urging Education Secretary Betsy DeVos to extend the moratorium on federal student loan payments through at least September 30 of next year. “If student loan payments resume on January 1, repayment will compound the difficulty created

by unprecedented labor shocks and ongoing economic hardship,” they wrote in an [Oct. 28 sign-on letter](#).

NEA was among the 236 organizations urging president-elect Joe Biden and vice president-elect Kamala Harris to cancel federal student debt on Day One of their administration. Doing so “would provide much-needed stimulus to help all Americans weather the pandemic and the associated recession,” they wrote in a [Nov. 18 sign-on letter](#).

## **SUPREME COURT**

*On Sept. 26, a week and a day after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, President Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett to succeed her on the Supreme Court. The Senate approved Barrett’s nomination on Oct. 25 in a near party-line vote of 51-48—every Democratic senator present voted against her, as did Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine.*

An [Oct. 8 letter](#) from NEA to the Senate Judiciary Committee said: “It is now just 26 days until Election Day. Voting has begun all across the nation and will continue through November 3. The majority of the American people say, by wide margins, that the winners of the ongoing elections should choose the successor to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. We agree and urge the Senate to heed the people’s voice.”

An [Oct. 14 letter](#) from NEA affiliates to the entire Senate said: “The Senate majority is rushing to confirm President Trump’s nominee, Amy Coney Barrett, before Election Day when that is NOT what the American people want. At least a dozen polls have found that most Americans want the winners of the 2020 elections—already underway—to choose the successor to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Reopening schools safely and alleviating suffering from COVID-19 should be the top priorities of Congress—for good reason. COVID-19 is taking an ever-increasing toll on our nation’s physical and economic health.”

An [Oct. 19 letter](#) from NEA to the Senate Judiciary Committee said: “When Justice Antonin Scalia died in 2016, more than 30 members of the GOP, including the current Majority Leader and Judiciary Committee Chairman, declined to fill the vacancy—out of respect for the people’s voice, they said. They also claimed to create a new policy: not filling any Supreme Court vacancy during the last year of a president’s term. The presidential election was nine months away when that policy was created, not already in progress as it is now.”

An [Oct. 22 letter](#) from NEA to the entire Senate said: “The rush to confirm the next Supreme Court justice has revealed a terrible truth: For the Senate majority, reopening our schools safely and alleviating suffering from COVID-19 do not merit action while filling the vacancy on the Court does. The House passed the HEROES Act, a robust relief and stimulus bill, on May 15, and

an updated version on October 1. In contrast, the Senate majority hit the pause button for four months, then brought forward woefully inadequate legislation.”

### **OTHER LEGISLATIVE NEWS\***

On Oct. 14, Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and John Larson (D-CT) announced the introduction of legislation to increase the [2021 cost-of-living adjustment \(COLA\) for Social Security beneficiaries](#) from 1.3 to 3 percent.

On Nov. 20, by a vote of [246-140](#), the House passed the **National Apprenticeship Act (H.R. 8294)**, which recognizes that programs offering on-the-job training and mentoring pave the way to successful careers, and helps bring these programs into the 21st century. “The legislation is particularly timely given rising joblessness and financial insecurity stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic,” NEA said in a [Nov. 18 letter](#) urging support for the bill.

*\*This list is a snapshot, not comprehensive*