



US FORUM CONNECTION

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**In this Issue:
Voice Your Opinion
The 117th Congress Begins
Advocacy in 2021
US Forum Presentation on
Legislative Issues February 24,
2021**

US FORUM

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Happy New Year! On 1.3.21, we welcomed the 117th Congress. The 116th Congress leaves us having enacted 252 public laws. A record of these bills can be found on Gov.org. The 117th begins with a clean slate. If a bill was not enacted and signed into law it “dies”. Bills can be reintroduced or rewritten and presented to the new congress.

During the upcoming year, we will look for congress to address the economy and workforce development to place women into jobs with family sustaining wages. We need investment into childcare, elder care, food insecurities, mental health and education while dealing with racial and social inequality issues. These issues have been magnified during the pandemic. We need to stand up and support pertinent legislation that assists women, children and education in 2021.



Join the US Forum on February 24, 2021 for our program: Legislative Issues for Our 117th Congress featuring Dr. Sylvia Johnson, Lobbyist at the National Education Association, NEA. Sylvia is an advocate and lobbyist who has worked with

members of Congress, staffers and the government agencies to advance the agenda of American educators. Registration will open on February 5. For more information follow us on Facebook @DKG.US.Forum.

Articles of Interest

Former Pre-K teacher to lead Senate Education Committee

The Washington Senator Patty Murray, a former preschool teacher, is about to become the top U.S. senator for education policy.

Andrew Ujifusa. “Patty Murray Set to Lead Senate Education Committee After Democratic Wins in Georgia.” *Education Week*. January 7, 2021 [Patty Murray Set to Lead Senate Education Committee After Democratic Wins in Georgia \(edweek.org\)](https://www.edweek.org/patty-murray-set-to-lead-senate-education-committee-after-democratic-wins-in-georgia)

Biden’s education secretary choice on key issues

Connecticut Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona, Biden's pick for education secretary, has taken positions on an array of K-12 issues, which are delineated in this article.

Evie Blad. “Where Biden’s Choice for Education Secretary Stands on Key K-12 Issues.” *Education Week*. December 22, 2020 [Where Biden's Choice for Education Secretary Stands on Key K-12 Issues \(edweek.org\)](https://www.edweek.org/where-biden-s-choice-for-education-secretary-stands-on-key-k-12-issues)

Education Issues

How the pandemic could help fix education inequalities

Education faces existential change as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. But the tumult may open the door for innovation,

helping schools reduce inequality – through everything from micro-schools to joy-based learning. [Stephanie Hanes. “How a pandemic exposed – and may help fix – inequalities in education.” *Christian Science Monitor*. September 8, 2020](#)[5 ways to reinvent schools amid the pandemic - CSMonitor.com](#)

Public schools face funding ‘death spiral’

Even with the approved billions of federal dollars, public schools in many parts of the country are headed for a financial cliff, as the coronavirus drives up the costs of education while tax revenue and student enrollment continue to fall. School officials say that the federal package is not nearly enough to make up for the crushing losses state and local budgets have suffered during the pandemic, or the costs of both remote learning and attempts to bring students back to classrooms. Advocates for public education estimate that schools have lost close to \$200 billion for learning. [Stephanie Hubler, Kate Taylor and Amelia Nierenberg. “Public Schools Face Funding ‘Death Spiral’ as Enrollment Drops.” *NY Times*, December 24, 2020](#) [Public Schools Face Funding ‘Death Spiral’ as Enrollment Drops - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

Survey: Students report academic declines

A third of students say they have good grades now -- compared to 58% before the coronavirus pandemic, according to a survey by the National Education Association and the National Parent Teacher Association. The survey found support and praise from MS & HS students for their teachers as schools have adjusted in response to the pandemic.

Kara Arundel. “Survey: Students praise teachers' efforts, have concerns about academic declines.” *K-12 Dive*. December 17, 2020

[Survey: Students praise teachers' efforts, have concerns about academic declines | K-12 Dive](#)

Report: How to diversify teacher prep programs

About 64% of participants in teacher preparation programs are white, according to a report from the New Teachers Project. The report recommends ways to help close the diversity gap in such programs, including setting recruitment goals, offering financial incentives and setting admissions requirements.

[Sarah Wood. “Report Provides Recommendations to Close Diversity Gap in Teacher Preparation Programs. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. December 17, 2020](#) [Report Provides Recommendations to Close Diversity Gap in Teacher Preparation Programs - Higher Education \(diverseeducation.com\)](#)

How teachers are fighting disinformation

Online spread of false information-like the recent claims of voter fraud-poses ongoing challenges for civics teachers.

Fostering critical thinking year-round, and not just when controversial events are in the news, can get students into the habit of vetting information. One-way teachers do this is by setting "standards of proof"—for example, requiring students to present multiple sources to support a claim.

[Sarah Schwartz. “Disinformation Is Rampant. Here's How Teachers Are Combatting It.” *Education Week Teacher*. November 25, 2020](#) [Disinformation Is Rampant. Here's How Teachers Are Combatting It - Teaching Now - Education Week Teacher \(edweek.org\)](#)

Teacher unions influence reopening decisions

Unions continue to push for a conservative approach to school reopening. In many cases, unions are arguing that they do want students back in school, but only when particular safety precautions are in place—such as mask-wearing, proper ventilation, and testing. Those safeguards have proven to work, at least when cases in the community are under control. Early studies suggest that teachers’ unions are driving school districts’ reopening decisions more so than COVID-19 infection rates in the community.

[Madeline Will, “How Teachers' Unions Are Influencing Decisions on School Reopenings.” *Education Week*. December 2, 2020](#) [How Teachers' Unions Are Influencing Decisions on School Reopenings - Education Week \(edweek.org\)](#)

Websites of Interest

American Association of University Women	www.aauw.org/
American Federation of Teachers	www.aft.org/
American Library Association	www.ala.org/
Children’s Defense Fund	www.childrensdefense.org/
Coalition on Human Needs	www.chn.org/
Institute for Women’s Policy Research	www.//iwpr.org/

Issues concerning Women and Children

December data show women's employment declining in pandemic—no clear end in sight

- Women's jobs on payroll have declined for the first time since last April. New BLS data for December show women lost 156,000 payroll job. Men's jobs on payroll rose slightly by 16,000.
- Hispanic women faced a 9.1 percent unemployment rate, the highest among women and an 11 percent increase since November.

Washington, DC—December unemployment numbers show an abysmal end to the year for working women, who lost a far greater proportion of jobs on payroll than men. Women held 5.4 million fewer jobs on payroll than they did in February 2020, prior to the COVID-19 recession. Men held 4.4 million fewer jobs on payroll than last February.

Most of last month's change is attributable to a dramatic decline in Leisure and Hospitality jobs on payroll, where women lost 282,000 jobs compared to 216,000 for men, and decline in the government sector, where women comprise more than 90 percent of job losses.

Women's job losses have been compounded by racial and ethnic differences, and Hispanic women have faced the highest rate of unemployment among women (9.1 percent).

While Black women lost 82,000 jobs on payroll, they also saw a 6.7 percent decline in the rate of unemployment to a rate of 8.4 percent. This is likely due to a decline in those looking for work, with a fall of their labor force participation rate by 0.9 percentage points.

"As the pandemic continues to drag on and businesses and schools remain closed, women will continue to fall out of the workforce," said IWPR President and CEO C. Nicole Mason. "Any economic recovery package from the new administration will have to center those most impacted women—and include opportunities for education and training, and contain economic and child care supports."

Keri A. Potts, IWPR Vice President External Affairs | potts@iwpr.org | 860-839-3438 [January 8, 2021 Institute for Women's Policy Research News Brief](#)

Congressional Information

Information regarding your Senators and congressional House Representatives can be found at **Congress.gov**. You have access to their committee assignments, and pertinent information along with upcoming committee reports and bills introduced. It is a valuable source for all.

Opinion: Your voice matters! Write your senators and congress members regarding promoting any of the bills listed. For every 5 constituents they hear from action is taken.



Now that most of us are sequestered it might be that opportunity for you to pursue a legislative issue that you are concerned about. Connecting with your legislators during Covid-19 has generated new challenges. Email messages and connecting to the legislator's website messages have now taken priority. Contact to local offices and District offices for Congress often generates quicker responses. More than ever, your physical address and area code are factors in receiving responses from these offices. These offices will respond to phone calls and emails. Mailing postcards is still a way to address concerns but be aware that many are working remotely. Information regarding your legislators can be found at congress.gov and local county, city and town websites.