

NASFAA's "Off The Cuff" – Episode 105 Transcript

Allie Bidwell: Hey everyone. Welcome to another episode of "Off The Cuff." I'm Allie Bidwell, one of our *Today's News* reporters.

Stephen Payne: I'm Stephen Payne with NASFAA's policy team.

Megan Coval: And I'm Megan Coval with NASFAA's policy team.

Allie Bidwell: Back at it again this week, Megan, you were traveling.

Megan Coval: Yes, Monday and Tuesday I went to the South Dakota conference.

Allie Bidwell: Cool.

Stephen Payne: Very nice.

Megan Coval: So, it was a quick trip, but very nice, yeah.

Stephen Payne: Where was it?

Megan Coval: It was in Deadwood.

Allie Bidwell: Okay.

Megan Coval: So, it was-

Allie Bidwell: What's in Deadwood?

Megan Coval: Well, the little that I saw ... I know what ... this is not doing it justice, I feel like there were a lot of casinos in Deadwood.

Allie Bidwell: Okay.

Megan Coval: But I'm sure-

Allie Bidwell: My grandparents would love that.

Megan Coval: Yeah, I'm sure that there are other things there as well, but-

Allie Bidwell: I only ask because like when you say the name Deadwood I feel like that's one of those cities that's-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: I think something famous is there.

Stephen Payne: Sounds familiar.

Megan Coval: Yeah. It's not too far. Well, you went to Mount Rushmore when you were ...

Stephen Payne: Yes, when I went to the South Dakota conference, that was probably ... three or four years ago now, we were in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Megan Coval: That's where I flew into.

Stephen Payne: Okay.

Megan Coval: So that's not too far from Mount Rushmore.

Stephen Payne: Did you stop by Mouth Rushmore?

Megan Coval: I did not, no.

Stephen Payne: Oh, you should have.

Megan Coval: I know. Somebody picked me up, which was very nice.

Stephen Payne: Oh, okay.

Allie Bidwell: That's nice.

Megan Coval: Yeah. So, it was a great trip and it took about an hour to get there, but they're a great group, it's nice. There were just north of 30 of them total, so they are all together for all of their sessions, and I think they really look forward to that time together and it was good to ... it was good to be out there.

Allie Bidwell: Nice.

Stephen Payne: Nice.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Very nice people.

Allie Bidwell: Quick Google search turned up that Deadwood is known for its gold rush history, so ...

Megan Coval: Okay.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, that makes sense.

Allie Bidwell: Today we learned that.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Okay, all right.

Stephen Payne: Check.

Megan Coval: So, and casinos, sorry Deadwood. Gold rush first, history first.

Allie Bidwell: Then casinos. And you had another interesting encounter on your travels, right? That you shared in the-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Policy channel.

Megan Coval: Yeah, I feel like the interesting thing about living around here, of course, at any given time is ... probably similar to living in LA with similar to when seeing celebrities is that we'll bump into political folks. So, and Stephen and Justin and I especially like to share when we bump into ...

Allie Bidwell: Political celebrities.

Megan Coval: "Important people."

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: And Jeff Sessions, former Attorney General in the Trump administration was behind me in line getting on my Delta flight.

Stephen Payne: Nice.

Allie Bidwell: Economy?

Megan Coval: Well-

Allie Bidwell: No?

Megan Coval: I knew that probably wasn't the case, he was behind me for a long time in the cabin two line, which was the last line in Delta. And then he hopped skipped over to first class.

Allie Bidwell: Ah.

Megan Coval: He was with his wife.

Stephen Payne: Nice.

Megan Coval: So ...

Stephen Payne: Were you connecting through Minneapolis?

Megan Coval: Yes.

Stephen Payne: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Is that where he goes?

Stephen Payne: I don't know, I was just wondering.

Megan Coval: Oh, Steven said that, like, "Well that's normally where Jeff Sessions goes."

Stephen Payne: Yeah, no, I don't know.

Megan Coval: To Minneapolis.

Stephen Payne: I don't know. I feel like you must have a lot of like weight off of your shoulders to-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, did he look like really-

Stephen Payne: To have gone through that whole process and now just-

Megan Coval: Yeah. But he was in the full suit and tie, and his wife was with him. And I was pretty sure that it was him, and I told Steven I saw his ... he had a monogrammed bag that said "JBS" and so I was like-

Allie Bidwell: Like a backpack? Or like a-

Megan Coval: Like a suiter bag.

Allie Bidwell: A messenger bag. Oh.

Megan Coval: Yeah, so ... I was fairly certain that it was him. I did not ... I didn't say anything, but I was a little surprised ... you know, you have to remember where we are in DC here that he ... I wasn't sure if he would be like heckled at all. Or maybe people just leave people alone, but ...

Stephen Payne: I think maybe here people are more likely to do that, but-

Megan Coval: That's what I mean.

Stephen Payne: I think ... yeah, no, I agree. I think ... but I don't think generally people are like-

Allie Bidwell: I don't think people in Minneapolis would-

Stephen Payne: Holding back. People aren't really-

Allie Bidwell: Heckle him.

Stephen Payne: I don't know, people are like very angry about-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Everything Trump related, people have very strong thoughts, I should say. So, it wouldn't surprise me if someone-

Megan Coval: Well that's what I'm saying ... yeah.

Stephen Payne: Well, nonetheless, glad he was ...

Megan Coval: Yes, because this is another thing, and this was in the news this week, I'm just going to dive into this. Did you guys see that ... so Kellyanne Conway, advisor to-

Allie Bidwell: Oh, yeah.

Megan Coval: The President, several months ago, was apparently assaulted or involved in some sort of altercation at Uncle Julio's which is in Bethesda, not far from where we live, and we love Uncle Julio's, it's a great Mexican restaurant, and there's some around the country. But there was some sort of altercation there, which similarly she said, Kellyanne said, "I was just out to dinner and this person came up to me and started bothering me, and then things were thrown, and ... "

Stephen Payne: Yikes.

Megan Coval: The case ended up getting dropped-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: That was in the news this week, but that, to my point, like you're right, people ... we've seen several.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, people going to restaurants and like-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, there was something in like Rosa Mexicano in-

Stephen Payne: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Like new Chinatown, like near the-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Near Capital One Arena. I forget who it was. It might've been ... DHS.

Stephen Payne: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Kirsten?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Or no, no ...

Allie Bidwell: No, I think it was her.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Well regardless, yeah, you're right-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: It has happened I think more than once-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: In restaurants, people find out someone's there.

Allie Bidwell: And Sean Spicer too, like someone approached him I remember when he was still press secretary.

Megan Coval: Oh, I forgot all about Spicey.

Allie Bidwell: Throwback.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Throwback. Yeah, anyhow, so that was ... who I saw.

Allie Bidwell: Cool.

Megan Coval: On my flight. Yes.

Allie Bidwell: Fun times.

Megan Coval: Yeah, but it was a great trip, glad to be back. I felt like there was a lot going on when I was gone. Sometimes we travel, and things are-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, it's always like-

Megan Coval: Kind of slow, and then other times-

Allie Bidwell: It like happens at the most inconvenient times.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Yep.

Allie Bidwell: And one of the things that happened while you were traveling was that FSA put out this guidance on what institutions should avoid saying in their award notification letters.

Megan Coval: Yep. Yeah, so that came out Monday. And I think it's very fair to say that we were not aware that this was coming down the pike, so-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: We were not engaged in it, and I, to the best of our knowledge, none of our members were engaged in it. So yeah, again, just guidance, and they're using the word "avoid", so things to avoid. And obviously the issue of award notifications has bubbled up, especially within the past year. Just last week we talked about the bill that came out of the Senate on standardizing financial aid awards. So, I'm just going to rattle through these, we covered them in *Today's News*, but what Ed is saying to do is avoid calling your financial aid offer an award and avoid calling it a letter.

Megan Coval: And I'll just make a quick point on that. I mean, we haven't gotten to the point where we discuss not using the term award, although that has certainly come up-

Allie Bidwell: Right.

Megan Coval: In conversations. We have-

Allie Bidwell: But the letter part has.

Megan Coval: Yeah, we've tried to move away from letter to notification. Avoid issuing a financial aid offer that does not include cost of attendance. And they go on to talk about how important it is to sort of break out those elements as well. Avoid listing the cost of attendance without breaking it down into clear components, which is what I just said. Avoid listing grant and/or scholarship aid loans and work study together.

Allie Bidwell: Right.

Megan Coval: Avoid listing student loans without clarifying the source, so whether they're federal, state, institutional. Avoid listing PLUS loans with other student loans. Avoid issuing financial aid offer without critical next steps. And avoid issuing a financial aid offer without the net cost calculated.

Stephen Payne: And I thought on that point number seven, the avoid issuing a financial aid offer without critical next steps, critical being all in caps.

Megan Coval: I know, critical was all in caps there, so I was like is this an acronym at first, or what's ... Long story short-

Allie Bidwell: So-

Megan Coval: Yeah, go ahead.

Allie Bidwell: Like overall we would be on board with a fair amount of this.

Megan Coval: Yeah. I think ... I mean, that's the thing, I don't think any of this ... this doesn't really differ too much from where we've been on these issues. I think it's just more ... we usually like to be a little bit more involved in these processes, and also, I think the interesting thing to point out is it's just this month that Ed is asking for feedback on their College Financing Plan, which is their new version of the Shopping Sheet, which they plan to implement next year.

Megan Coval: And there are things on that new College Financing Plan that don't align with this guidance that just came out. So, for example, this guidance says avoid listing PLUS with other loans. The college financing plan does list PLUS with the other loans. The college financing plan doesn't have a place for critical next steps. So, it's not that this is necessarily bad, it sort of just gives the impression like a-

Allie Bidwell: Mixed signals.

Megan Coval: One hand not talking to the other, or sort of-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Yeah. So, I mean, we're going to point that out, and we're going to be giving feedback on that college financing plan. And so ... and I think those things, I mean, listing next steps we think is important. So that's all feedback that we'll give. But it's just ... it's just one of those issues where this happens from time to time where it seems like every week-

Allie Bidwell: Miscommunicate.

Megan Coval: Something new-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Comes up with it, so ...

Stephen Payne: Yeah, another indication that this is a big issue.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: And that a lot of folks are ... have their eye on it. And I know that-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: When we've been on the road recently, at difference conferences and things, this topic has come up too, and I know I've talked to a lot of folks from schools who have said that they've done some changes to their award notification over the past year or so, and I think there's just a lot of conversation right now about this, so hopefully that yields some good results.

Megan Coval: Yep. So, Congress interested, Ed interested, community groups interested, we're interested. So ... stay tuned.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, and other things happening this week, speaking of PLUS loans, a couple new reports came out on one from New America and the Urban Institute on making some changes, suggesting changes, to the Parent PLUS loan program. And another from AccessLex Institute on the Grad PLUS loan program.

Allie Bidwell: So, the first one on the Parent PLUS loan program sort of argues that the standards and eligibility requirements have not been as maybe strict as they should've been and that has led to problems with this program. And that in order to fix it, the answer is not to open up income driven repayment to all borrowers, but rather to sort of put in a fix for currently borrowers to help alleviate some of the burden from them, and then change the standards for the program moving forward for new borrowers.

Allie Bidwell: So, making current borrowers able to participate in some sort of income contingent repayment plan, things like that.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, one interesting thing in there about that exact issue with Parent PLUS being a part of the income driven repayment options, we've seen from some pieces of legislation, particularly from some House Democrats, the interest in including Parent PLUS in the income driven repayment options. Obviously, there's a ... a debate there between that would certainly cost a lot of money, and whether, as you're thinking about the design of the income driven plans, like the assumption is that like for a student, that you will like go on to earn more money.

Allie Bidwell: Right.

Stephen Payne: But for a parent, maybe-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, that's not why the program was designed, so there was sort of like this philosophical discussion about like the real purpose of the different loan programs.

Stephen Payne: Right, yeah.

Allie Bidwell: And like for parents it's like-

Stephen Payne: And I think that'll be a big part of HEA.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: I don't know where Congress will land on any of these PLUS issues, but ...

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. Yeah. So just ... I think like some of the suggestions have just been to do like one or the other. Like just tighten requirements for everyone, which would kind of ... would hurt current borrowers, obviously. Or to like sort of loosen it for everyone, which isn't necessarily what you want. So, this is the first one that sort of takes a two headed approach at it.

Megan Coval: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we had lots of comments on this article too, I noticed, so-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, I just pulled it up and hadn't looked back at it, and I was like, whoa.

Megan Coval: Yeah, no, I mean but-

Allie Bidwell: People have thoughts.

Megan Coval: Yeah, yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Which are all great. I love when people comment on stories.

Megan Coval: I do, too. And I like trying to figure out who it is, too.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. Sometimes you know, but-

Megan Coval: Sometimes you know.

Allie Bidwell: Sometimes you don't.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Depends who you are.

Megan Coval: But needless ... I mean, this is definitely going to be, as you said Stephen, a big part of reauthorization looked at closely.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, I know that Rachel from New America, who authored this report with folks from the Urban Institute, is doing a session at our conference this summer.

Megan Coval: Yes.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, I'm glad you said that.

Stephen Payne: On Parent PLUS and this whole issue, and so if you're interested-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Plug for the conference and plug for the session and talking more about it with the author of the report.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah. And our conference schedule is up now. So ...

Megan Coval: Right. Yep.

Allie Bidwell: People can go look at the sessions and start-

Megan Coval: Come on down.

Allie Bidwell: Getting pumped up for those. On the other hand, this other report from AccessLex Institute is talking about the grad PLUS program. And really, they're arguing that proposals to cap or eliminate the program are unnecessary and sort of making the argument that like the actual proportion of Grad PLUS borrowers who have that like excessive amount of debt above \$100,000.00 is actually relatively very small. They estimated that it's about 9% of the population. So, I think it worked out to about 72,000 borrowers out of 810,000 who have Grad PLUS loans.

Allie Bidwell: And they also go through and sort of argue that the concerns about having too much debt forgiven also are probably overstated because, again, the borrowers who have that large amount of debt is relatively small. And that would also assume that all of those borrowers would enroll in income driven repayment, and we've seen data saying otherwise, that it's more like a third to 40% who actually end up enrolling in income driven repayment. So even that, the concern is probably overstated.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: But this one also doesn't make recommendations for how to change the program, although they do say that there is room for improvement with Grad PLUS. They kind of just argue that capping it or eliminating it is not the way to go.

Megan Coval: And I think ... I don't know, any time we talk about PLUS, whether it's here, or in The Hill, I think it's just ... it is so, to me, intimately tied with the PSLF conversations. And I think ... we spend, I think, a fair amount of time unpacking critiques about one or the other, and whether or not they're really focused on that program in particular, or frustrations with like well, when people talk about-

Allie Bidwell: Right.

Megan Coval: PSLF it's like are you frustrated with that program itself, or are you frustrated with the fact that you can borrow up to cost of attendance under Grad PLUS? And that's really where ... and people come from-

Allie Bidwell: It's the combination of those.

Megan Coval: Different ... it is a combination, but often, I think Stephen you probably agree, that you'll hear people talking about it and you're realizing like ... their ire is sometimes directed at the wrong place.

Stephen Payne: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, and I thought that was interesting because they like talk about that-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: In this report. That it's maybe not ... their frustration is not with the-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Grad PLUS program.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, I think with both of these, and I'm glad we're having the opportunity to talk about two different reports around PLUS, because I do think there is a lot of attention to it. And I think it's important, and this is one of NAFSA's recommendations to split them to really discreet programs-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: To ensure that we're designing the programs in such a way that makes sense for parents, which is obviously a completely different population than grad students, right? But I'll also say that we haven't seen a lot of nuanced proposals around changes to either PLUS program. We've seen, for the most part, like straight elimination, which in prosper they eliminate Grad PLUS altogether, and then slightly raise the grad un-sub limit and they eliminate Parent PLUS too, and raise again, slightly, the parent loan limit.

Stephen Payne: But I feel like we haven't seen a lot of nuanced positions that are sort of more middle ground-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: On them. And I think maybe, who knows, on HEA that's where whatever bill is finally signed into law will probably be a little bit more middle ground. I just don't know ... I don't have a sense of where like ... if you're thinking about maintaining it as is or eliminating it, where do you meet in the middle or as you're negotiating the whole bill, like do you say, "Okay, we'll keep Grad PLUS uncapped, but I want this other change over here."

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: If you're a Republican worried about the cost of the program or something like that.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: I feel like that is the middle ground, is like capping it and making a change to some other aid program.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: And that's one thing that I've heard a few times now in different hearings, and I think it was Beth Akers who first said, who's at the Manhattan Institute, I think, and saying like to eliminate PLUS, but if you do that, you have to increase like Pell, or something else on the front end for students.

Megan Coval: Yeah. And they talk about that in this report too.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: You know, that there are other issues that need to be fixed.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: The fact that we even need to have the Parent PLUS program-

Allie Bidwell: Mm-hmm.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, we had our grad professional student loan limits task force from a year or two ago put out a white paper, just thinking about some of these ideas around PLUS. And their conclusion in that report was suggesting one loan for graduate students, which has been the trend in the conversations, one grant, one loan, trying to simplify the aid system, but having sort of ... like \$30,000.00 of that be subject to underwriting, and then the rest of it ... or not subject to underwriting, and then the rest of it subject to underwriting up to cost of attendance. So, sort of keeping the same general model, but introducing a little bit of underwriting into the system. So ... that report is out there, so ...

Allie Bidwell: And everything we're talking about today actually ties together like really nicely, because the next thing we're talking about is Public Service Loan Forgiveness. And a bill that was introduced last week by 15 Senate Democrats, or 14 Democratic Senators and Bernie Sanders, who's an independent, to overhaul the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. And part of that would sort of expand the types of repayment plans that would make a borrower eligible for loan forgiveness, and to improve sort of the guidance and communication with that program.

Allie Bidwell: And one thing to note is that the bill would make all types of loans eligible for forgiveness and would allow borrowers to consolidate their loans without risking ineligibility. It would make borrowers enrolled in any loan repayment program eligible. And currently, you guys can probably explain this better than I can, but if you're in an extended or graduated repayment plan, you're ineligible except under some circumstances right now. So, this would sort of undo that. And it would also require the Department of Education to just in general provide borrowers with more information about program eligibility, how many payments are counted and why, how to dispute an issue, things like that.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, there was also in that bill, pretty significantly the piece around partial forgiveness.

Allie Bidwell: Yes. I forgot that.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, yeah, no, there's a lot in this bill.

Allie Bidwell: There's a lot.

Stephen Payne: But that would obviously be a pretty big change from where we are today. So, you could have half of your loans forgiven at the five-year mark, and then 100% at the 10-year mark. We've seen legislation, there was a bill that would do like proportional forgiveness, like 10% every year, this bill sort of settles on doing 50%-

Allie Bidwell: Meet in the middle, yeah.

Stephen Payne: At five, and then 100% at 10. But all of these changes, so this proportional forgiveness, adding in extended and graduated into the mix, sort of fully opening the doors to eligibility for PSLF, will significantly increase the price tag-

Allie Bidwell: The cost of the program, yeah.

Stephen Payne: Of the program. And that's something that has been criticized over time, so much so that it led to President Obama proposing caps on forgiveness a few years ago as part of his budgets.

Megan Coval: But again, we haven't really seen those costs pan out.

Stephen Payne: Right, it's such an interesting-

Megan Coval: Because so many people are getting denied.

Allie Bidwell: Mm-hmm.

Stephen Payne: Right. Right, for not meeting the program requirements, which were designed by Congress. And so ... I don't know, there's always a lot of finger pointing, but I think that there's been a lot of critiques of the department and I know the press release they put out around this bill talks about how only less than 1% of all eligible applicants have received the loan forgiveness they deserve. But most of the denials, if you dig into the data on it, are for not ... like being in the wrong repayment plan.

Allie Bidwell: Repayment plan, yeah.

Stephen Payne: For the most part, and that's largely because these are folks who had fell loans, which existed when the program started. And so, it's not necessarily a whole like Department of Ed fully to blame, but they have so blame too with implementation-

Allie Bidwell: Like everyone has a little bit of-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, yeah-

Allie Bidwell: Blame here and there.

Stephen Payne: So very complicated program, and at the very least, regardless of the price tag question, expanding eligibility fully makes it simpler at least, that-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Mm-hmm.

Stephen Payne: Like doesn't matter what repayment plan you're on, what loans you have, you are eligible for this program, so that may make it easier to explain. But unfortunately, that doesn't necessarily help the folks right now who are trying to navigate the-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, there's like that and you could simplify and maybe like keep the ... you know, what qualifies as-

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Eligible employment, keep that a little bit tighter is one way to go about it. But who knows? Like the chances that this would actually go anywhere are pretty low, I'm thinking.

Megan Coval: I mean, as is, yes, but I do think from a political standpoint ... this is ... we're talking about a fair number of people who don't want to see the program exist at all. And then we have the program as it is. And now that this bill has been put out, it sort of ups the ante, right, and shoots for the moon more, so to speak. So, when you get into a scenario where negotiations might occur around this program, it's like now they're starting from this more generous place.

Allie Bidwell: And walking it back.

Megan Coval: Yeah, and rationing it back, versus starting with just how it us. So, I think there was some ... yeah, some interesting kind of political maneuvering done there. And I don't mean that to be a negative thing, I think that's ... they just want to create a new starting place. So ...

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: And I think the conversation has changed a good bit about ... the nature and merits of the program over the past few years. I don't think if President Obama was still president that he would propose the caps on forgiveness that he did.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: It seems like there's been a shift in conversation and Prosper really bore that out, the House Republican HEA bill that included the elimination of PSLF. And that seemed to be one of, if not the main issues that people seemed to push back on in the bill, was the elimination of PSLF. A lot of lawmakers heard from their constituents about how they didn't support that provision, and you have a very interesting population at play here, right? You have like police officers, and teachers, and firefighters, and like ... it's not necessarily politically savvy to try to like-

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: Think about pairing back benefits for that population. And then you had, as part of PROSPER, the Department of Defense coming out and putting out in a memo in the bill saying that we don't support the bill's elimination of PSLF, it's a big recruiting tool that the Pentagon uses for their purposes. So ... and that was in the midst of the Trump administration.

Megan Coval: Yep.

Stephen Payne: Having a Republican administration putting out ... sort of its opposition to a Republican bill in the House was a really big deal, and all of this around PSLF. So ... yeah.

Allie Bidwell: And meanwhile there was actually like some more discussion about the temporary expanded-

Stephen Payne: Yes.

Allie Bidwell: PSLF.

Stephen Payne: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Did you want to touch on that, Stephen?

Stephen Payne: Sure. So ... over the past few days, as Congress is ramping up to start thinking about funding levels for the next year, the past two years we've seen \$350 million dollars appropriated each year, so now we have \$700 million in total, for TEPSLF, which is the Temporary Expanded PSLF, which essentially creates a pool of funds for the department to buy back essentially loan payments that were made for a borrower who was in the wrong repayment plan.

Stephen Payne: So, this was aiming to get at some of the issues that the piece of legislation we just talked about would fix but would do so immediately. And so TEPSLF has now existed for almost a year now. It was first included as part of the fiscal year 2018 package, which passed last spring, and then another \$350 million in the fiscal year '19 package, which passed in September of this past year.

Stephen Payne: And so, Senator Warren and other Senate Democrats sent a letter to the appropriations committee saying, "We would like to make a few small tweaks to the fix that we included in the-

Allie Bidwell: Fixing the fix.

Stephen Payne: Fixing the fix. And one of the fixes they suggest to the fix is to eliminate the requirement that was in there that said a borrower had to, within the last 12 months, made payments that are at or above what they would pay under an eligible repayment plan. Essentially the IBR plan. And so that obviously makes things complicated for the department to calculate payments, but also complicated for the borrower to figure out am I eligible for this new program, am I not?

Stephen Payne: All of that said, I know we've talked about, on this podcast before, that there's like no one has been eligible for TEPSLF and some of that is at the fault of the way it was designed by Congress, but other fault to the department for the way they've implemented. So, for example, a borrower has to be denied PSLF-

Allie Bidwell: Right.

Stephen Payne: Before they're eligible for TEPSLF, and being denied takes time, like that doesn't just happen overnight.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, it's like a double application.

Stephen Payne: Right, and if you're in the wrong repayment plan, you may not necessarily think instinctively like, "Oh, I'm going to apply for PSLF. I'm only at nine years," let's say, or eight years. "I'm going to apply to get denied, just so I can apply for this other program." That obviously makes things very-

Allie Bidwell: Nobody thinks like that.

Stephen Payne: Complicated. So, the Senators asked for more specific language for this provision to require the department to do certain things to make it a little bit simpler to implement.

Stephen Payne: But another one of these PSLF complications-

Allie Bidwell: Shenanigans.

Stephen Payne: Yeah, that Congress is thinking about.

Allie Bidwell: Good to know.

Megan Coval: Lessons to be learned.

Allie Bidwell: Anything else you guys have for this week?

Stephen Payne: I don't think so.

Megan Coval: No, I don't think so. One thing I thought ... well, it's just one thing, and we don't have a lot of information on it, but I thought was interesting that was announced within the past week, was that Ed is going to look at doing some experimental sites around income share agreements.

Allie Bidwell: Oh, yeah.

Megan Coval: But I didn't see anything formal written up on it.

Allie Bidwell: Just the like FYI is this coming.

Megan Coval: Yeah, yeah, to expect something like that. So ...

Stephen Payne: Yeah, that'll be interesting.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: I mean, obviously, when we get more information on that you guys will hear about it.

Megan Coval: Yep.

Allie Bidwell: I think that about does it then. We're getting these like really quick and efficient lately.

Megan Coval: Yeah. Yeah. Packing the punch.

Stephen Payne: Best episode ever.

Allie Bidwell: Best episode ever.

Megan Coval: Yes. We should say Happy Easter and Passover-

Allie Bidwell: Passover.

Megan Coval: Easter folks, depending on what, if you celebrate.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Stephen Payne: I know a lot of schools are on Spring Break.

Megan Coval: Spring Break, yep.

Stephen Payne: So ...

Megan Coval: But Allie, your Easter is not-

Allie Bidwell: Next ... it's not this weekend, but next weekend.

Megan Coval: Next weekend.

Allie Bidwell: Mm-hmm.

Megan Coval: Okay.

Allie Bidwell: Greek Orthodox Easter. I get two Easters.

Megan Coval: And what did you give up for Lent?

Allie Bidwell: So, we don't do that.

Megan Coval: Oh, I thought ... the only reason I ask that is I thought there was something that you were giving up for Lent.

Allie Bidwell: I mean, in the sense like you know how Catholic people are like, "I'm going to give up soda."

Megan Coval: Yes.

Allie Bidwell: We don't do that.

Megan Coval: Okay.

Allie Bidwell: But we do do a strict fast.

Megan Coval: That's what I'm thinking of, okay.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: No meat?

Allie Bidwell: No meat, you can only eat fish that does not have a backbone, so shellfish.

Megan Coval: This is the whole time-

Allie Bidwell: The whole time.

Megan Coval: Not just Fridays, like-

Allie Bidwell: The whole time.

Megan Coval: Okay.

Allie Bidwell: No dairy.

Megan Coval: What?

Allie Bidwell: And oil. And for the most part no alcohol either. But very people I know-

Megan Coval: What does that mean?

Stephen Payne: For the most part.

Allie Bidwell: Well on some days you can have-

Megan Coval: I'm just kidding.

Allie Bidwell: Like fish and on some days you could-

Megan Coval: Oh, so they're like ...

Stephen Payne: Oh, gotcha.

Allie Bidwell: But like Palm Sunday you can have fish, but I don't know many people, if any, who do that strict fast. Like I gave up meat, like land meat, but I still am eating most fish.

Megan Coval: Chicken of the sea.

Allie Bidwell: And I gave up dairy.

Megan Coval: Okay.

Allie Bidwell: But that's just something I have done on my own anyway recently. But yeah, most people, I think, just-

Megan Coval: So, no cheese?

Allie Bidwell: Give up meat. Yeah, no cheese.

Megan Coval: Wow. Okay.

Allie Bidwell: Just give up meat or only give it on certain days. Like I know some people only do the fast on like Monday, Wednesday, Friday, like it just depends.

Megan Coval: Okay, all right.

Allie Bidwell: But yeah, it's very intense.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Allie Bidwell: I tell people when they're like, "Well, so what can you eat?" I'm like, "Pretty much lentils and like PB&J sandwiches for 40 days."

Megan Coval: Uh-huh.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Megan Coval: Wow, yeah.

Allie Bidwell: But I did cave recently, and I like ... I ate some chicken, I was like, I can't ... I just ... I couldn't hack it.

Stephen Payne: We won't tell.

Megan Coval: All right, so two more weeks of that for you.

Allie Bidwell: I'm sure this is, yeah, stuff that everyone wanted to know about so, yeah, thanks for ...

Megan Coval: I actually find it fascinating.

Allie Bidwell: Thanks for coming to my Ted Talk.

Megan Coval: Yeah, I-

Allie Bidwell: On Greek Easter.

Megan Coval: Yeah, I like learning about that. Yeah, it's much ... we're more loosey-goosey, so I like ...

Allie Bidwell: Well-

Megan Coval: Yes, have fun celebrations this weekend, whatever-

Allie Bidwell: Yes.

Megan Coval: Whatever you might be doing, or-

Allie Bidwell: And thanks for joining us for another episode. As usual, send us your comments, questions, suggestions. And remember to subscribe, tell a friend, and we will talk to you all next week. Best episode ever.

Megan Coval: All right.