

NASFAA's "Off The Cuff" Podcast - Episode 178 Transcript

Justin Draeger:

Hey, everybody. Welcome to another edition of Off The Cuff. I'm Justin Draeger.

Allie Arcese:

I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team.

Megan Coval:

I'm Megan Coval with our policy team.

Jill Desjean:

And I'm Jill Desjean, also with our policy team.

Justin Draeger:

Welcome back, everybody. Last week, obviously quite a bit happened. And then, quite a bit happened even after we left the podcast. So, we'll catch up on all of that, some of the things that are going on this week, take a little prospective look of what's ahead.

Justin Draeger:

Real quickly, yesterday I went into the office. D.C., as you can imagine if you've been watching the news or reading the news, is in a complete lockdown. So, to get to our building, the NASFAA building, how many blocks is it from the White House?

Allie Arcese:

Like, two?

Justin Draeger:

I guess like two.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, two.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, two blocks. One block from the whole White House complex, but two from the actual White House. They had the perimeter pushed out three blocks, and they were interviewing every single vehicle, stopping you and interviewing you if you were trying to get inside that perimeter. And then, as of 8:00 a.m. this morning, they said that you could not get into that perimeter. And any cars that were in that perimeter as of 8:00 a.m. this morning, Thursday morning, you couldn't get those cars out until after the inauguration.

Allie Arcese:

So, our office was inside that perimeter?

Justin Draeger:

Yes, it's in that perimeter. So, if you had left your car in a garage, and it was in that garage at 8:00 a.m., you can't get in that car, you can't move that car. So, it's obviously very locked down. The one thing I thought about though is tomorrow we're doing this webinar. Megan and Jill, you'll be on this webinar. I think this is the first webinar I'll have to do from home, because we won't be able to get into the NASFAA office.

Justin Draeger:

You two have done them at home before, but this makes me very stressed because of just the number of factors like kids and delivery people and a dog. Also, on ON24, the platform, we can't do virtual background, so I'm very stressed about what's going on behind me here and-

Megan Coval:

Do we do video on these ones?

Jill Desjean:

We don't, no.

Justin Draeger:

Well, I don't know about that. I think we have done video.

Megan Coval:

Not on the COVID one.

Justin Draeger:

I think you guys always say, "I don't think we need to do it," and then the TRA webinar people are always like, "People like video. Do the video."

Megan Coval:

But we haven't done a COVID one on video, I don't think.

Justin Draeger:

Oh, we haven't?

Megan Coval:

Not I mean-

Justin Draeger:

So there's a precedent.

Megan Coval:

I don't know.

Justin Draeger:

There's a strong precedent is what you're saying.

Allie Arcese:

But I think your background setup is just some cabinets.

Megan Coval:

It's very nice.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah

Megan Coval:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

It is. But look, there's this thing here. Can you see what this reads right here?

Allie Arcese:

No, it's a glass cabinet with some stuff in it.

Justin Draeger:

Okay, all right. There's pithy and kitschy sayings in here like "Be Amazing". I don't want people to see that. I don't know how that got in there. I don't adhere to be amazing. I don't like looking at it, and I ignore it. Like everything in my house, if it stays there for more than three days, it just becomes part of the landscape. But I don't want 3,000 people tomorrow to see, oh, Justin's got a "Be Amazing" sign behind him, wow.

Megan Coval:

I would have never noticed it. But now...

Jill Desjean:

You don't have to worry about that, but I won't make you feel better about it being really stressful to do webinars from home. It is really stressful.

Justin Draeger:

The struggle is real.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, the ON24 takes a lot of bandwidth, so you're worried about your internet connection. You've got little people running around, like you said, all the things that can go wrong that don't tend to happen in an office.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, my kids and family were super careful about me being in meetings, I'd say, for the first week of the pandemic. And then since then, they just walk right in. They're like, "Are you in a call?" And I'm like, "Shh." I'm literally talking. I'm in mid-sentence.

Megan Coval:

You need to buy one of those office-style signs for your outside that you slide. It's like, "In Meeting".

Justin Draeger:

That's a great idea, and maybe I could just leave it "In Meeting". The other thing is we have a wireless printer now, so la-de-dah, but I have four other people in the house who are constantly sending stuff to the printer. So, it's going off like bananas next to me all day. Anyway, it's going to be a whole thing tomorrow.

Justin Draeger:

All right, we have a lot to talk about it. But Allie, let's get started by talking about some listener feedback. What do we got?

Allie Arcese:

Sure. Last week, you asked everyone what their one word expectation for 2021 was going to be. One of the answers we got was from Michael Bennett. He's at St. Petersburg College?

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, that's right.

Allie Arcese:

Michael Bennett from St. Petersburg College said his one word expectation for 2021 is money. Good luck with that.

Justin Draeger:

That was it, just money?

Allie Arcese:

Money.

Justin Draeger:

Well, we do need more COVID relief, so we're going to talk about that a little bit later today. But yeah, all right, we'll accept it.

Allie Arcese:

Brad Williams from College Options said, "Of course, my one word for 2021 is Justin, or maybe I should change it to pander."

Justin Draeger:

I accept all pandering, and I subject myself to flatterers.

Allie Arcese:

It works.

Justin Draeger:

So, it's totally fine.

Allie Arcese:

And then, we had some comments on just our discussion about what happened at the Capitol last week. People were appreciative that we had an open conversation about it and just the fact that we've been keeping everyone up-to-date on the legislation going around in the midst of all the chaos.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, we appreciate all the comments. And we did get quite a few comments about last week's discussion and conversation and editorial. It's always a bit of a risk when we get outside of bread and butter financial aid issues. There's always a quote I remember that's something to the effect of like, "To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing." There are times when I think we have to acknowledge the elephant in the room and in this case the constitutional elephant.

Justin Draeger:

So, let's pick up right where we left off last week, because when we finished the podcast, we were right on the heels of the insurrection on the Capitol incited by the President and quite a bit of fallout from that, including from Secretary of Education. Allie, do you want to catch us up just briefly on the letter that she sent out last week?

Allie Arcese:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Last week on Thursday, late in the evening on Thursday, Secretary DeVos actually submitted her resignation letter to President Donald Trump. The letter goes into a lot of the things that she feels were accomplished under the administration, under the department during her time as Secretary. However, there were a few sentences that were pretty telling.

Allie Arcese:

She wrote, "We should be highlighting and celebrating your administration's many accomplishments on behalf of the American people. Instead we are left to clean up the mess caused by violent protesters overrunning the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to undermine the people's business. That behavior was unconscionable for our country. There is no mistaking the impact your rhetoric had on the situation, and it is the inflection point for me. Impressionable children are watching all of this, and they are learning from us."

Allie Arcese:

That was just a little snippet of her resignation letter, which came in not long after we finished recording last week's episode.

Justin Draeger:

So Allie, I'm curious. What's your reaction to the letter?

Allie Arcese:

Part of me feels like this was expected and not expected at the same time. Secretary DeVos was one of the longest-serving cabinet members from the administration and at times one of the most loyal to President Trump, defending his decisions even when she got thrown under the bus for it. I'm thinking about the Special Olympics, things in the budget, things like that. So, that kind of surprised me. But I feel like if anyone was going to resign at this point, someone who is involved with children would probably make sense.

Allie Arcese:

She also released a statement after the mobs at the Capitol, the riots over there, which was a little telling. Looking at that and then thinking she resigned the next day, that part is not as surprising if you read the statement she put out.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, she took a pretty hard line. I know some people looked at that and said, "Well, are these people resigning out of protest? Are they resigning because they don't want to get caught in the 25th amendment, where the Vice President with half the Cabinet could remove the President? They don't want to be put in that position?" It's always... Yeah, go ahead.

Allie Arcese:

The 25th amendment thing was interesting because I thought, like you said, maybe she's resigning because she doesn't want to have to take a stance on that. I can't remember if it was Maggie Haberman from the New York Times maybe, but there was a reporter who was tweeting who was privy to the conversations that were going on saying she only submitted her resignation after it became clear that Vice President Pence was not going to push for the 25th amendment.

Justin Draeger:

So, in a sense, waiting. I think there was a lot of silence in the administration amongst the Cabinet members as Vice President Pence was trying to decide what he was going to do. Also, I feel like in the absence of evidence, I think it's worth giving people the benefit of the doubt.

Justin Draeger:

Betsy DeVos, as the secretary of education, took a lot of criticism but stood by her talking points the whole way. The thing that I took away from her letter is that this should have been, the last several months should have been, the administration's victory laps. That's what she tried to do in the first part of her letter. Like, we accomplished this, this, this. She's a big school choice proponent, federal funding for charter schools, a lot of K-12 policy. This should have been the victory lap. Instead it was completely consumed with pushing lies about the fraudulent election, which is just such a missed opportunity for any administration who should have been promoting the longevity of the policies and legislative victories that they had. Instead, squandered on a lost cause ultimately.

Justin Draeger:

Anyway, the other thing I thought was interesting about all of this, because I got another question that came in by email from a NASFAA member which was sort of a process question but sort of a norms question, is, when do people normally resign? Political appointees have known that the Trump

administration had lost months ago, even if they wouldn't admit it publicly. What is the normal course? Is it really out of order for the secretary to resign a week out?

Justin Draeger:

I think what's abnormal here is the Secretary resigned in protest. That is notable. But the other thing is people might not realize when a new administration comes in, the old administration actually as a matter of course dictates a memo to all federal agencies and political appointees and says, "We expect you to resign before the new administration comes in." It's a way of clearing the deck without having the new administration have to come in and fire people. So this is something that happens as a course of business. The Trump administration just did it last Friday. That is very-

Allie Arcese:

Cutting it kind of close.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, when there was finally a concession that like, "I've incited a riot, and now we have to move on." Finally, the Trump administration was okay to send that memo out. But that normally happens much earlier. That said, Megan, we've known political appointees on the Hill who have been looking for jobs and leaving for months.

Megan Coval:

For months, yeah, in this administration.

Justin Draeger:

That's right. So this is not necessarily abnormal, but that process is probably something that goes unseen.

Megan Coval:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

One other thing I thought was interesting, you mentioned the New York Times. One other article I read about all this was in The Atlantic. For my money, if you're going to subscribe to a magazine, I don't get any residuals from this, people, but The Atlantic to me is just probably one of the best and oldest magazines around. But they did an article about Mike Pence which was so interesting to me.

Justin Draeger:

Vice President Pence, one, which hadn't dawned on me, I know this, but the Vice President is not a position that can be fired. When you look at Donald Trump, he's known for the whole "you're fired" thing, and he did go through a lot of different people in chief of staff positions, cabinet positions. The one person he can't fire constitutionally is the Vice President, because it's an elected position.

Justin Draeger:

And so, they did this profile about how Vice President Pence just started showing up at the Oval Office early in the administration and then just started going to meetings in the Oval Office that he wasn't

invited to. The way they couched it was advisors around him would say that he was trying to be the stable voice in the room. The popularism of Donald Trump is this erratic thing that people like to watch as a spectacle. Mike Pence is the exact opposite of that. He's the conservative, traditional, stable Republican.

Allie Arcese:

He knows the game.

Justin Draeger:

Right, he knows the game.

Megan Coval:

He knows the game. He stays in his lane.

Justin Draeger:

That's right. Loyal to the president. In the article, it acknowledged before people literally came into the Capitol threatening his life, he doesn't say anything bad, but the way the article couched it is the adult in the room.

Justin Draeger:

There's a lot of people who don't agree with the Trump administration and previous administrations, and they say, "How could you ever go work for that administration?" And I just think that's a tough thing. I don't judge people who worked for the Trump administration any more than I judge people who worked for any other administration. I don't judge folks, or I try not to judge folks who've stayed on to the end, because those positions are important. Decisions get made. This is how things get done. I can't imagine most political appointees agree 100% with their bosses, but we still need the wheels of government to work, and so I try to withhold judgment on some of that.

Megan Coval:

Yeah, that's a really good point. I think about Vice President Pence as, whether you agree with him or not, a man of conviction. You really look at him and watch him and get the sense and believe that he really believes in the things that he is advocating for and the beliefs he espouses, whether you agree with him or not, I think.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, I also think nobody would argue. That he's a steady force. You might not agree with a single policy he believes in, but you would see him as a steady force. And then, there are people like that filling political positions all over the map.

Justin Draeger:

So Megan, we just had a call with the Department of Education this last week. There's political appointees who have stayed on that are providing continuity, and that's important when you have legislation that just passed like COVID relief bills. And we still need answers to thorny questions, so there's a continuity issue here. Anyway, all of that is to say, the Secretary made her point. I think we take her at face value. She's moving on, and in another week we'll have a new administration.

Justin Draeger:

And on that note, also starting this next week, Megan, we're going to have a new Democratically-controlled Senate. I think we've touched on this before. Any other highlights you want to hit with this?

Megan Coval:

We talked a little bit about it last week in terms of more procedurally, what the Senate can or can't do with either a simple majority or a super majority. But I think as we think about it more specific to higher education, what it really means for us is it's not a golden ticket that all of the Democratic or Biden administration higher ed policies are going to sail through. But it does really help ensure that they will be on the agenda, that they will be considered, that they will be given air time. I think that's the best way to think about it.

Megan Coval:

The party in control really has the most authority over what it allows its other members of the party to consider. That's where, I think, we'll have some opportunity to really see some of the ideas and policy priorities advance.

Justin Draeger:

One name I'm going to throw out there that I think people are going to need to pay attention to in this new senate, Elizabeth MacDonough. Elizabeth MacDonough is the Senate Parliamentarian.

Justin Draeger:

We've got a 50/50 split, 51 if you include the president of the Senate, the Vice President Kamala Harris. They still have the filibuster rule. It doesn't look like it's going away, at least in the immediate future. Some of the more moderate Democrats have said they don't want it to go away, Joe Manchin stands out to me from West Virginia, which means if they try to pass something with a simple majority, it has to go through the budget reconciliation process. The Senate Parliamentarian is a non-elected official. But Elizabeth MacDonough since I think 2012, 2013, she's the one who decides what can go into a budget reconciliation bill and what is not germane to that bill.

Justin Draeger:

So to the extent that the Democrats are planning on passing something with simple majorities in budget reconciliation bills, Elizabeth MacDonough, the Senate Parliamentarian, is someone that folks are going to get to know really well, because she'll actually rule on what can be in that bill and what can't.

Megan Coval:

I love that kind of stuff. That's like little Washington little insider. This one person in this particular position has such a unique power.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, the Senate appointed this. This is not a constitutional position. This is a position created by the Senate to help them stay within the rules and framework they've drafted for themselves. Other than that, Megan, I think you're exactly right. They set the agenda. Nothing's guaranteed though.

Megan Coval:

No.

Justin Draeger:

So, we will see what happens.

Megan Coval:

No. And it's going to be just this weird, constantly moving map to watch, because I think about it as we have these process buckets. We have something that can just go through the normal legislative process or the normal budget process or the budget reconciliation process, and then we have all these different policy priorities. What we'll start to see happen is that folks will try to manipulate and squeeze their particular bill or issue into whatever bucket is moving at that time. Each of those buckets have their own specific rules and processes. That's just another definition for politics.

Megan Coval:

But, you'll have free college. Maybe we'll try to get it in HEA. Maybe we'll try to get it in budget reconciliation, whatever we can do at the time. I don't say we as in NASFAA, I should say, but we as in the holder of whoever is trying to move it on the Hill at that time.

Justin Draeger:

Well, Senate Majority Chuck Schumer has already said that the very first thing on their agenda sounds like it's going to be another COVID relief or stimulus bill, which we hope will include additional higher education funding.

Justin Draeger:

So, that lines up with the President-elect who has called for extending these borrower benefits but then also has said we need additional stimulus funding. The big wrench in there is that the current Senate Majority Mitch McConnell is about to be handed, if not already, an impeachment from the House of Donald Trump. And so, Senate Majority Leader McConnell has already said that they're not going to come back in an emergency session to tackle this before the inauguration.

Justin Draeger:

So, that gets handed then to the new Senate Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer. In the first 100 days of a President, the most valuable time is floor time in the House and the Senate, because you're in this 100-day window. Everything's pedal to the metal. Do you use that time to debate an impeachment conviction which has to be done in the Senate, or do you use that time to press on meaningful legislation?

Justin Draeger:

When the President-elect was pushed on this these last few days, he basically said, "I expect the Senate to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time," which is do both, do everything the Senate needs to do. So President-elect Biden isn't letting them off the hook to choose one or the other.

Megan Coval:

Yeah, that's how you wish that it should be when you think about all of us in our jobs and the things that we do. We don't just get the luxury of working on one thing at a time. But I'm just thinking back to last

year, and it just sucked up all of the oxygen in the Senate for however many weeks it was. When we do our federal update presentations, we point to the impeachment process last year as something that really held up progress on other things like reauthorization. So, I like that idea. I just think in practice, it's-

Justin Draeger:

It could fall apart.

Megan Coval:

It's hard, I think.

Justin Draeger:

The only thing that's different this year is last year was completely partisan in terms of votes at least. Only Democrats voted for impeachment. And on the Senate side, the only Republican who voted for conviction was Senator Mitt Romney. What is just so different this time is Senator Mitch McConnell, currently the Majority, presumably the Minority Leader in the next Senate, he didn't say he wouldn't vote for conviction. I think he actually said that the President has committed impeachable offenses, one; and two, he would withhold judgment through the trial, which is just a different world from where Republicans were a year ago.

Justin Draeger:

For those who are wondering, the Senate can convict even after the President has left office. Separate from that, once you have a conviction, they can then prohibit with a simple majority. To convict you need two-thirds of the Senate. But to just after the conviction stop President Trump from ever running for president again only requires a simple majority which Democrats have. So by convicting, they are basically then also prohibiting the current President from ever running again, because Democrats can do that alone without any Republicans.

Megan Coval:

Well, it's going to be not even a wild first 100 days, it's just going to be a wild first few weeks, that's for sure.

Justin Draeger:

The Trump team has been doing some work before they leave office. Allie, it looks like they were weighing in on something Secretary DeVos talked a bit about before she left, which is free college but more specifically waiving or, I guess, forgiving all federal student loan debt.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, and this is something that Democrats have pushed for in a number of forms. Senator Schumer has said that the Biden administration should cancel \$50,000 of student loan debt across the board. The idea to cancel \$10,000 of student loan debt as pandemic relief has also been floated. So, it's kind of the question of what route to go down. Can Congress do it? Yes, they can. Could the department unilaterally do it? Or could the President do it through executive action?

Allie Arcese:

The current Department of Education has come out and said that the Secretary does not have the statutory authority to cancel, compromise, discharge, or forgive on a blanket or mass basis principal balances of student loans and/or to materially modify the repayment amounts or terms thereof.

Allie Arcese:

A couple of caveats there: This was noted in some coverage of the letter. This was issued by an acting secretary of education, so it's not necessarily binding. The new administration could come in and issue a different memo with a new interpretation.

Allie Arcese:

One thing, President-elect Biden has said that he's not necessarily considering acting through executive action to cancel student loan debt, so that leaves Congress and the Department of Education. We're not really sure which road that would go down.

Allie Arcese:

But some folks have floated a specific section in the Higher Education Act. I believe it is section 432 of the Higher Education Act that actually the Department of Education said that that was the statutory authority they were using to waive interest accrual during the pandemic. So it's kind of matter of how far can you stretch that.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, so it's like the Secretary has the authority. She can change terms and conditions of loans. Can she actually just wave a wand and do away with \$1.6 trillion in loan debt? We don't know because it's not in court.

Justin Draeger:

But this idea, when I first read this story, I was like, "So the Republican lawyers in the Department of Education issued a memo that said that the Secretary doesn't have the authority to waive loan debt." If I'm the Biden administration, I come in, it would be like I'm being sued by somebody, and then I go seek legal advice from the attorneys that are suing me.

Justin Draeger:

The Biden administration, it doesn't matter one way or the other, I think, what this says. But what it does, it gets them on the record and provides a legal framework so that if somebody does want to challenge the Biden administration, if they seek to just start waiving loan debt, that now there's an internal document, or now external, at the Department of Education leaked obviously to the Wall Street Journal first, that anybody who wanted to bring a suit against such an action would be able to do so within a legal framework where at least the base work has already been done.

Justin Draeger:

So I really think this just sets up a legal battle that will have to be tested in law. But as you point out, Allie, it sounds like everything that the President-elect is saying is he'd prefer this just be done by Congress, that he wouldn't have to be put in a position to do this.

Allie Arcese:

I think maybe the first step is just seeing what, if anything, they include in additional pandemic relief and going from there.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah. Megan, forgiving all student loan debt, is this a good idea or bad idea? I'm going to put you on the record right now.

Megan Coval:

I don't think it is the best use of funds if we're talking about to really even address indebtedness. I was going to say to move the needle on access and success in other things that we really care about too, but I think it's a lot of money for, A, a Band-Aid that's not really solving the root issue.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, in a world of unlimited resources, I guess I would say sure.

Megan Coval:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

The NASFAA board of directors actually just had a meeting where they did a deep dive on forgiving student loan debt. I think the concern is in a world of limited resources, there's just so many other good things we could do with student loans that need immediate attention, and I think are probably politically achievable, that might get overshadowed by the entire conversation of loan debt. You're talking about things like, what about just doing away with origination fees? What if we got rid of negative amortization? What if we got rid of loan default as we know it today and all the fees and all the penalties that are assessed and heaped on borrowers who are in distress? What about this idea that the Biden administration floated about rolling public service loan debt forgiveness so instead of waiting 10 years, you get it as you go along? What about moving income-based repayment forgiveness from 20 years to 15?

Justin Draeger:

I guess what I'm saying is you can still do debt forgiveness in a more targeted way. It feels like we're going to miss all of that if all the oxygen is sucked up around, should we just get rid of \$1.6 trillion in loan debt?

Megan Coval:

Yeah. It's a different policy idea, but you could pay for, just based on the estimates that we've done back of the envelope, 10 years of doubling Pell for what it would cost to wipe out at this one moment in time \$10,000 in debt for everyone.

Megan Coval:

We talk out of both sides of our mouth, because a lot of times we encourage ourselves-I'm just saying internally-to think about policy first and not the price tag. But when it comes to really big things like this, I think knowing you may have to make choices, it is something that you have to take in consideration.

Justin Draeger:

Well, the-

Allie Arcese:

I was just going to say there's also the very real concern that a lot of people have about fairness for the people who have already paid off their loans.

Justin Draeger:

Proponents often gloss over this idea of like, "Why should I care if somebody else gets it? Go, have that benefit." I think the political backlash, particularly for people who didn't go to college or didn't feel they could go to college, is real.

Justin Draeger:

And then, there's the sustainability issue. Even if you wiped it all away, what happens next year or the next year or the next year? And if we're going to do \$100 billion in forgiveness every year, maybe we should just do grants.

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, why have loans.

Megan Coval:

Yeah, that's a really good point.

Justin Draeger:

Anyway, I feel like it starts to break down. It's a great election talking point. In terms of policy, there's a little bit here to be desired in terms of substance and how it might work.

Justin Draeger:

All right, let's keep moving on. Jill, we still have the reporting window open for annual reporting for HEERF funds. What do we got? Anything new on this front?

Jill Desjean:

Nothing new on that front yet. The reporting window is open until February 1st, as you said. Most schools got their login credentials in early January, the first week of January. We have heard that some schools have not. ED is aware of the issue. They have been working hard to try to get everyone their login credentials, but obviously super frustrating for those of you who don't have them. You can contact that heerfannual@ed.gov email address to report your concerns if you don't have them yet.

Jill Desjean:

We're still anxiously awaiting the allocation amounts and guidance for the new round of HEERF funding that came out of the gigantic COVID-relief bill in late December. Congress gave ED 30 days to make allocations, so they have another week and a half. But word on the street is that allocations and guidance might be coming soon on that. We haven't seen anything yet. I literally just checked my inbox just to make sure, because-

Justin Draeger:

Okay. Good, stay in it, because you don't want to be talking and something gets released

Jill Desjean:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

I got it.

Jill Desjean:

I'll note it's Thursday at 12:30 in the afternoon. Although by the time you guys see this, it could be out.

Jill Desjean:

But two pieces of good news in there: A, schools will receive their funds soon, because ED doesn't have much longer to release those allocations, and we're hearing that guidance will probably come out at the same time as the funds, so that could be nice as compared to last year where guidance starting coming out after the funds were released and schools were struggling to figure out what they had done with funds that they had already spent and might not be necessarily in compliance with the guidance that was released after.

Jill Desjean:

We also just wanted to remind people that we don't know what's coming, but we don't know how compliance with CARES Act annual reporting, the report that's due on February 1st, might interact with the release of these supplemental HEERF funds. It doesn't seem unreasonable to expect ED to want you to have complied with the reporting requirements from the first bit of money you got before they're going to give you more money. And so, if you are able to get your report in before the February 1st deadline, we would encourage that.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, there's some precedent for this in that the department would say, "Get your reporting in, and then you move on to the next round of funding or the next phase." We could see that here.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, and it's not anybody's fault. The deadline February 1st was set a long time ago. No one knew when Congress was going to pass this new COVID bill. Just the timing works out such that there could potentially be funds available before the deadline. But if you've got your login credentials, and you're able to get all that data, it's probably a good idea just to cross your T's and dot your I's so that there is no reason that your funding could be delayed.

Justin Draeger:

And tomorrow's webinar, Friday's webinar, we're going to talk about some of these issues, some of the outstanding questions that we have that I'm sure schools are asking, and we'll be taking Q&A from NASFAA members about this next round of funding. So, people can tune in for that, and that is free and open for NASFAA members. And I think actually we're opening it up-

Allie Arcese:

And for non-members.

Justin Draeger:

And for non-members too with some generous support from grant funding and NASFAA members. So, this will be one of those webinars that is open to the public.

Justin Draeger:

Also wanted to put a plug in for an upcoming NASFAA U course. It's first-come, first-register. We do have some seats still available. Allie, what is it? It's on the Pell grant, right?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, this is on the Pell Grant and Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant programs. It's a four-week interactive course. I think all of our NASFAA U courses have been super popular, but this one, you'll talk about topics like calculating remaining eligibility, grant recalculations due to changes in enrollment status, EFC or cost of attendance, a whole bunch of things. There's live instruction, discussion topics, and assessments throughout the course. And upon passing the course, you get a complementary access to the credential test. We'll put a link in the show notes for this upcoming course. It's starting soon, in about three weeks on February 9th.

Justin Draeger:

These are great courses to learn from other people, see what's going on in other offices, benchmark, meet, and then interact. The other thing is if you have professional dollars to spend or a lot of folks who when our conference was canceled kept a balance here at NASFAA, this is an allowable use of any balance funds that people have and are looking to spend down in this fiscal year. So, take a look at that.

Justin Draeger:

All right, let's do our What Was That? at the end of this week. This is the time of year when you do your retrospective and your prospective of the year ahead. I'm going to data mine the three of you and find out what was your best purchase, however you define best, maybe it's value, bang for the buck, most impact. No judgment. Well, we'll do judgment. But, what was your best? Maybe I can use something that you guys have. Megan, let's start with you.

Megan Coval:

Okay, I actually really think you're going to like mine, Justin, because we've had this conversation before, and you said it at the beginning about sleeping. I'm a lousy sleeper, always have been, and I got-

Justin Draeger:

You're a loud sleeper?

Megan Coval:

Lousy.

Justin Draeger:

Oh, lousy. Like, you're a light sleeper.

Megan Coval:

Well, just can't fall asleep, that type of thing. Have trouble getting to sleep and stuff.

Justin Draeger:

Right. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Megan Coval:

I got this nice, new, fancy alarm clock called the Hatch alarm clock. Two things that it does: You control it from your phone. And it allows you to establish a bedtime routine. So I have mine set up, for example, that I go in and turn off all the other lights, but I hit it, and it gives me a reading light for 15 minutes, and then it automatically goes off. And then, the light dims, and it goes into this little quiet five-minute meditation, and then it turns off.

Megan Coval:

I have been falling asleep so much better with that wind-down. But the best part is for the wake-up. It's like a half moon shape, and a half hour before, it simulates the sun rise. It is so good for waking up.

Justin Draeger:

Jill, how about you?

Jill Desjean:

I got these solo lanterns for my backyard. They're pretty simple, nothing special, no brand name, so I wouldn't get any money for advertising them. I have an old house, and I feel like every time we try to make something better, sometimes we make it worse. And even at best, it's like, "Hmm, well, we tried."

Justin Draeger:

It didn't turn out quite how it looked online.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

Right, yeah. I'm familiar.

Jill Desjean:

And this is just like four solo lanterns. It took me five minutes to hang them up. I don't have to turn them on. The sun turns them on.

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, and they work.

Jill Desjean:

And they're just around my fire pit, and so when we go outside to have a fire, we've got all these pretty... It's like a little glass jar with fairy lights in it. I feel like I'm in a magazine or something. I'm just like, "Yeah, if someone would take a picture of this, it would be like, 'Man, I wish I could live that way.'" I'm like, "I'm living that way."

Justin Draeger:

Yeah, delightful.

Jill Desjean:

It feels really nice.

Megan Coval:

I like it.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, they're awesome.

Justin Draeger:

Good for you. The only issue I have with solar is like, "Is it going to last?"

Jill Desjean:

I've only got about two months in-

Justin Draeger:

Okay, they're working.

Jill Desjean:

... which is honestly more than I thought I'd get.

Justin Draeger:

Okay. Well then, good. If it's exceeded your expectations, you're happy.

Jill Desjean:

Yes.

Justin Draeger:

All right, Allie, how about you?

Allie Arcese:

I would say we bought a house this fall.

Justin Draeger:

Oh, booyah.

Allie Arcese:

I don't know if that's a real answer. But we had talked about for a long time that when we moved we were going to get a bigger bed, which we did. And so, as part of that, we had to get a new mattress. We got a Tempur-Pedic mattress. Similarly, I have problems sleeping, and Pascal snores. This has solved all of our problems. He doesn't snore anymore.

Justin Draeger:

Really?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah, if he turns over, it's the craziest thing. He moves around a lot, and I can always feel him, and it wakes me up. I can't feel him rolling around, because it doesn't transfer the movement.

Justin Draeger:

Nice. So, did you guys get a king-sized bed?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah. It's great.

Justin Draeger:

A king or-

Allie Arcese:

I'll throw my arm out, and I won't even be touching him he's so far away.

Justin Draeger:

Yes.

Megan Coval:

So amazing, isn't it?

Justin Draeger:

All right, here's mine. I'll just say that I know I'm talking to three women here, but there's some purchases that I make that I feel self-conscious about, particularly as I think about my grandfathers who are both passed away but they're from the Greatest Generation. This is the generation that was fighting Nazis and living through the Great Depression and eating nails. You know what I'm saying?

Allie Arcese:

Yeah.

Justin Draeger:

I'm not talking toxic masculinity here. I'm just talking tough people. And we bought this last year a bidet. This will be the thing if my grandfathers were alive, I would be humiliated to talk about. But I'm telling

you, in terms of sanitation, in terms of comfort, this is game-changing. It's not that expensive. You do not have to be a contractor to install it.

Allie Arcese:

I feel like bidet evangelism is on the upswing.

Justin Draeger:

All right, so folks, send us your best purchases in the last year. Let us know, how can we upgrade our lives through your purchases? Remember to subscribe. Tell a friend. And we will see you again next week.