

NASFAA's "Off The Cuff" – Episode 96 Transcript

Justin Draeger: Hey everyone, welcome to another edition of "Off The Cuff." I'm Justin Draeger.

Allie Bidwell: I'm Allie Bidwell, one of our Today's News reporters.

Megan Coval: I'm Megan Coval, with our policy team.

Justin Draeger: Welcome, everyone. Stephen is off at the American Association of Medical Colleges. Doing a presentation representing us and the profession well. What's he talking about there?

Megan Coval: Usually, we go to this conference every year and just kind of give a federal update from the graduate and professional perspective, so probably several different topics, reauthorization plus probably grad loan limits, things like that.

Justin Draeger: Public service loan forgiveness. The things that-

Megan Coval: Yeah. Sorry. The PSLF.

Justin Draeger: Yeah. Things that have been on the menu for graduate students for a while. It seems like we were talking about this offline, I think. Doesn't it seem just really, really busy?

Megan Coval: It's so busy right now.

Justin Draeger: Right?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: And I don't remember the first five weeks of a new Congress ... We've been through this many, many times. Since we've been in DC.

Justin Draeger: Over the last dozen or more years. It just seems ... What do you attribute this to? And for a lot of folks that are listening, a lot of stuff happening behind the scenes. A lot of, it feels like we're pulled in a lot of different bills right now. What do you attribute this to? Do you think that we just forget? Like we just get lulled into like we forget how bad it is, but-

Megan Coval: Like childbirth, right? What they say. Like you forget.

Justin Draeger: I mean, I don't have personal experience with that, but from my observation, maybe.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, I was thinking about that. I mean, I think maybe it does happen every new Congress, but from where I sit, I think it's just that new Congress, they took

maybe a week or two to ramp up and then we're just hearing from tons of different offices about reviving this bill from last congress or trying to get something put forward from their member, and I do think it's people sort of showing, "We're working. Look what we're doing."

Allie Bidwell: I find that kind of surprising, too, though, just given the fact that we could still end up in another shutdown and maybe you would think that-

Justin Draeger: I know. I can't stomach anymore. I swear, every single day, there are two articles out of every single major newspaper, saying the exact opposite. That we're really close to a compromise, but we could be facing a shutdown. This person's ready to compromise, but then this person has signaled they can't stomach that. I just can't read 'em anymore. We're gonna be shut down after another, next week, at the end of next week, we'll be shut down or we won't.

Megan Coval: I don't think we will, but I don't know what the solution is.

Justin Draeger: I don't know. There are so many things, where I always think in the last two years in particular, where I always think, "Oh, this would never happen."

Allie Bidwell: That's true.

Justin Draeger: Or this won't happen. Or what's the likelihood that's gonna happen.

Allie Bidwell: And then it does.

Megan Coval: And then it does.

Justin Draeger: Dun dun dun. Okay.

Allie Bidwell: Yes.

Justin Draeger: You guys watch the Super Bowl this last week?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Allie, you're gonna give us a play by play breakdown or ...

Allie Bidwell: I felt like I had to at least halfway root for Jared Goff, because he was a Cal quarterback.

Justin Draeger: Oh. I didn't even know that.

Megan Coval: Oh, yeah. That's a good reason to root.

Justin Draeger: I gotta say I do not follow the NFL, so I don't really wanna talk about the sports part about it.

Allie Bidwell: It was a boring game.

Megan Coval: It was.

Justin Draeger: It was boring. I'm sorry.

Megan Coval: Break a record for punts, that's the only record you break is a punting record.

Justin Draeger: That was at that point, is when Deanne and I and my kids were around, and Deanne was like, "I'm officially bored." I'm like, "Alright, let's go watch Game of Thrones." She has not watched it before, so we're doing it all before-

Allie Bidwell: That's exactly what we're doing.

Justin Draeger: Who hasn't watched it, you?

Allie Bidwell: Me.

Justin Draeger: You haven't watched it?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: Oh, Allie. What season are you on?

Allie Bidwell: We're towards the end of season 2.

Justin Draeger: I know people love or hate Game of Thrones, so I don't wanna bore the audience with this, but I just ... we have a lot to talk about.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, I mean at first, I was like, "Whatever, everyone's obsessed with this show," and now I'm like, "Let's watch another."

Justin Draeger: Yeah, and the cliffhangers are so ... you just wanna keep watching. But it's a big investment, it's not like a 50-minute show. It's a hard 60 to 70 minutes.

Allie Bidwell: I think that I also kind of annoy Pascal because I don't really care about spoilers, and I know certain things that have happened in the series. So, when something's happening, I'm like, "Oh, doesn't that guy end up doing this and this and that?" And he looks at me and he rolls his eyes and he's like, "Ugh. Maybe."

Justin Draeger: That's kind of what I do. Alright, halftime show. Did you watch it?

Megan Coval: I didn't.

Justin Draeger: Did you watch it?

Allie Bidwell: It was like on in the background and I just-

Justin Draeger: I mean, you're such a California fan, I thought when Adam Levine would take off his shirt and it said California on it that you would have been like, "Go California."

Allie Bidwell: No, I was like, "That's a little embarrassing."

Megan Coval: I do like Maroon 5. I've always liked them.

Justin Draeger: Well, I wanna give a little shout-out to a friend of mine, Stephanie Pesch, who is at Eastern Michigan University. She posted on Facebook that she thought it was the best halftime show ever.

Allie Bidwell: Okay, I saw articles saying the exact opposite.

Justin Draeger: I commented, and I said, "I hope this comment is sarcastic." So, Stephanie, I love you, but we gotta talk about your halftime Superbowl taste.

Justin Draeger: We also had a task force that was just in town this last week. They are looking at ...

Megan Coval: Innovative learning models. So innovative learning models and the treatment of them, so things like ... competency-based learning and prior learning assessment and things like that.

Allie Bidwell: What is the full name of this task force? It's like very long, it's like Modernizing Title IV-

Megan Coval: Modernizing Title IV Aid, I'm forgetting a word there.

Allie Bidwell: And something something something something.

Megan Coval: Yes, yes. So, but they've got a lot, I heard a little debrief that they are not lacking for at least initial recommendations. If anything else, there's a lot they're thinking about and-

Justin Draeger: People are always talking about innovative programs. But I feel like that can vary, the definition of that will vary based on institution and institution. It'll be based on which creditor you're working with, it'll differ based on who you're talking to at the Department of Education. Everybody talks about it, but how a school or even a college within a school is defining an innovative program is a little bit all over the map. And then trying to map student aid programs or returning of Title IV around these things is really complicated. So, we're really grateful for this task force that's come in. Who's the chair of the task force?

Megan Coval: It's Melissa Haberman.

Justin Draeger: Oh, from Wisconsin.

Megan Coval: Yes, who's perfect for this.

Justin Draeger: And the task force members are all online. So, if folks have comments or feedback, they can send in a policy@nasfaa.org, or they can reach out to any of their colleagues who are listed on their website who are ... we are very grateful are serving on this task force.

Justin Draeger: Okay. So other big thing happening this week, besides the Superbowl, football is the like the Superbowl of politics ...

Allie Bidwell: This is what I say-

Justin Draeger: See what I, see what I did there?

Allie Bidwell: Yes. When Erin was asking who was gonna cover this, I was like, "Oh, this is my Superbowl."

Justin Draeger: Okay. So, I feel like in past years, though, we've all been online at the same time typing at each other.

Allie Bidwell: I was really lonely.

Megan Coval: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: I know, I'm sorry. You know what, Allie, I can't anymore. I just ... I'm gonna just say this upfront about the State of the Union, alright? I have really strong feelings about this. I despise, I say this every year, this is not gonna be a huge schpiel.

Allie Bidwell: I know what you're gonna say.

Justin Draeger: I despise that we take what is a 25 to 30-minute speech and string it out to 90 minutes. I hate it.

Allie Bidwell: It's because of all the breaks-

Justin Draeger: The clapping.

Allie Bidwell: ... for all the applause.

Justin Draeger: The clapping. Stop clapping. Any president who's willing to get up and say, "Please hold all applause till the end," is the president-

Megan Coval: Has your support.

Justin Draeger: ... that will have my vote for life, because I can't do it.

Allie Bidwell: There were times too where I think there was supposed to be a break for applause, and it ... you could tell it was a second or two too long before people were like, "Oh, okay, this is where we clap."

Justin Draeger: Yeah, there's a whole cadence to it that you have to nail. President Trump did not mention higher education.

Allie Bidwell: No.

Justin Draeger: So not a lot to comment there.

Allie Bidwell: He did mention school choice, and sort of breaking off of that he also mentioned paid parental leave as a way for supporting parents and whatnot.

Justin Draeger: Unless I missed it, he also did not mention NASFAA.

Allie Bidwell: No.

Justin Draeger: Nor financial aid administrators.

Allie Bidwell: One of these days, someone from NASFAA is gonna be a special guest at the State of the Union.

Justin Draeger: Someone.

Megan Coval: That would be great.

Justin Draeger: Who's that gonna be? Probably an intern.

Megan Coval: I do ... yeah, but to your point, Justin, I mean ... and every president is different and has different priorities, so not trying to make a commentary here, but there was a time for several years where we would get a call from the White House the day or two before telling us, "This is gonna be announced in the State of the Union." I'm thinking like free community college, prior-prior year, or teasing it, just big things that they would give us a heads up on.

Justin Draeger: Those were the days.

Megan Coval: It was like really ... we would all sit down and kind of watch it together because we-

Justin Draeger: So, it feels like, I agree with you and I remember those days too, and it was exciting.

Megan Coval: Yeah, it was.

Justin Draeger: Because we knew what was coming in the speech, and we were given a heads up even before the press were receiving their prepared remarks. But the Obama administration was unique there.

Megan Coval: Yes.

Justin Draeger: President Trump is unique in a lot of ways, but in this regard, a lot of presidents have gone without higher education being mentioned.

Allie Bidwell: And just going back to earlier about Congress being busy and where their intention is, there's a lot of other things going on right now that probably take precedence over higher ed.

Justin Draeger: How dare you.

Allie Bidwell: I'm just being real.

Justin Draeger: No, I agree, and I appreciate. And also, it's very clear this president has an agenda. That agenda isn't, I wouldn't call like a sweeping vision, it's largely focused on our Southern border. So, a significant amount of the remarks were focused on our Southern border and immigration, so. But the response, the Democratic response did touch on education a little bit.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, Stacey Abrams who pretty narrowly lost the bid for governor in Georgia gave the Democratic response, and she did plug issues that the Democratic party feels that should be in the focus like school safety, a clear pipeline for education from cradle to career, as we've heard that phrase commonly used, and student loan debt in passing.

Justin Draeger: So even though not mentioned in the State of the Union, it's still part of the conversation, and we would expect to see that in some of the Democratic priorities moving forward.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah.

Justin Draeger: That's a good lead into, maybe it's not the Superbowl of higher education, but a bowl game. Senator Alexander this last week.

Allie Bidwell: If it's not the Superbowl, then what is the Superbowl of higher education?

Justin Draeger: The NASFAA conference?

Allie Bidwell: Uhh...

Justin Draeger: Allie, how dare you?

Allie Bidwell: Okay, NASFAA conference isn't a competition, it's not like a game.

Justin Draeger: Well, that's true. What would be? I don't know.

Allie Bidwell: HEA.

Justin Draeger: I'm thinking about ... what'd you say?

Allie Bidwell: HEA.

Justin Draeger: HEA. Well I'm thinking like, an event, like a spectacle like the Superbowl. In that case you would have to say NASFAA, because our conference is-

Megan Coval: The granddaddy.

Justin Draeger: Allie seems less than ... maybe it's because you're working the conference.

Allie Bidwell: I promise, like I love NASFAA and I love the conference, but it's not the Superbowl.

Justin Draeger: But can we agree that Senator Alexander coming to an event and spending an afternoon talking about re-auth is at least like a bowl game, if we're gonna carry the Superbowl analogy all the way through this podcast.

Allie Bidwell: I agree.

Justin Draeger: So, Allie, why don't you give us an overview of what Senator Alexander talked about?

Allie Bidwell: Sure, so Senator Alexander came to the American Enterprise Institute, which is a more right-leaning think tank in D.C. and laid out his three main proposals for what he wants in a reauthorization bill. That was FAFSA simplification, streamlining and simplifying student loan repayment, and accountability. And the way he described those FAFSA simplification was primarily cutting down the number of questions from 108 to about 25, data sharing, and student loan repayment, taking that down from nine repayment options to two. A standard 10-year repayment plan, and an income-based repayment plan, both of which would be taken directly out of your paycheck. Accountability, he described as gainful employment expanded.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, which later he said in a Q&A would be basically gainful employment for all programs.

Megan Coval: For all, based on repayment.

Justin Draeger: But redefining-

Allie Bidwell: Repayment rate, yeah.

Justin Draeger: ... the metric which is repayment rate, yeah.

Allie Bidwell: Didn't get into detail about exactly what or how the repayment rate metric would be structured.

Megan Coval: Yeah, and I think of those three things, it's clear, and this is no surprise, but the FAFSA simplification really, I think for Senator Alexander is the cornerstone. I mean, he came out right in the beginning and said sort of all things that we can do, fixing the FAFSA will improve access for higher education in a way that nothing else can.

Allie Bidwell: And that's been his main push for as long as they've been working on HEA reauthorization. He always holds up the paper FAFSA.

Justin Draeger: Did he have a paper FAFSA?

Allie Bidwell: He did.

Justin Draeger: What year was it?

Megan Coval: I don't know.

Allie Bidwell: I don't know.

Justin Draeger: Nobody got a picture of what year it was? Because I just wanna know if-

Allie Bidwell: We got a picture of it.

Justin Draeger: Was it 2019-20 or was it in 2018-19 or was it a previous year's FAFSA?

Allie Bidwell: I would imagine probably a previous year's FAFSA.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, because I don't think they print that anymore like that. You can still print the PDF but the department, do they make paper ... they don't send paper FAFSAs to schools anymore, do they?

Allie Bidwell: I think that he just has those things and keeps it, just like he has the binder of regulations that he used to pull out at hearings.

Justin Draeger: Yeah, and I have the binder of consumer information and Mitt Romney had a binder full of women, so everybody's got their binders.

Megan Coval: I will say ... one thing I wanna say though, because I think, I just feel like this is really impressive, especially for ... we've been obviously in places where we've heard other members of Congress speak, but he spoke for a half hour. That's a long time.

Justin Draeger: Were they prepared remarks or off the cuff?

Allie Bidwell: They were totally prepared.

Megan Coval: They were prepared, but he spoke for a half hour. Then he sat down and did Q&A, took questions from a moderator, but also from the audience which is, those things are highly unusual for ...

Justin Draeger: When he came to our conference though, he also opened it up for questions.

Megan Coval: Yeah, I give him a lot of credit for doing that.

Justin Draeger: I do too. You have to be, there's a certain level of confidence you need to have in the subject you're talking about.

Megan Coval: He knows his stuff.

Allie Bidwell: And you need to have confidence in who is doing the moderating. One time, I once got a one-on-one interview with Senator Alexander and it was very hard to organize, and it took a lot of convincing on my part.

Justin Draeger: What do you mean it was hard to, like they were reluctant to have you interview the chairman?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, I was like, "I promise I'm not doing a gotcha interview. I just want ... his thoughts."

Justin Draeger: You didn't come in with a camera crew and follow him out of the Capitol?

Allie Bidwell: They ended up letting me come to his office and it was great, and he spent a pretty solid amount of time with me which was, I thought was really cool.

Justin Draeger: He can go in and out of the subject without any problem, which you would expect all chairpersons to be able to do. But Senator Alexander in particular, I think everybody knows former Secretary of Education, former college president, he knows the space.

Allie Bidwell: Former governor.

Justin Draeger: Former governor. So, we have a couple clips that we oughta go to.

Allie Bidwell: Because he did talk about a few other things. When mentioning the bipartisan bills that the Senate education committee has at least introduced over the last few years.

Justin Draeger: So, let's talk most ... let's first hit the consumer information piece on award letters.

Sen. Alexander: Senators Grassley and Smith have proposed requiring all institutions to use uniform language and award letters, so students can tell what the award is. I used to be against that, because I'm pretty adverse to federal rules. But with so many, so many students receiving letters every year that are, that do not make it clear what you have to pay back and what you don't, I think a requirement that they do is a good idea.

Megan Coval: This is actually interesting. Stephen and I were at the event in person, and this really caught our attention because for a long time Senator Alexander has been sort of against this fully standardized award letter. And he backpedaled a little bit later in this speech, but you can tell, you hear him say he's seen examples of what he called "poor award letters." So, I think we really have to pay attention, we are paying attention to this issue but him signaling this really is gonna make us dig in even more.

Allie Bidwell: I don't know how you guys took it, but I thought it was a little bit unclear as to whether he was saying that Congress should dictate exactly how award letters-

Justin Draeger: Here's how I took it. Megan, I'd be interested for you to correct me or disagree here. But when he first talked about it, I think that the most memorable piece about this is that for schools that are trying to give a signal where Congress is going, for him to say that at one time he didn't believe in standardization basically. And now he's seen enough bad award letters, that's a pretty big warning signal to our members. Whether it's your school or another school, this is a good example of how a few bad apples really can drive policy for everyone. Which is why we have to take so seriously our professional roles to not be punitive to our colleagues, but to say, "We all need to be at our best," because a few bad apples really can dictate policy for everyone.

Justin Draeger: But at later on when he talked about, he did say standardized elements, which is the verbiage that we use as well. We're okay with standardized elements and some standardized organization. What we don't want is top to bottom "here's what an award letter should be."

Allie Bidwell: "Here's the form you have to use."

Justin Draeger: The shopping sheet. Which it doesn't necessarily give all students the information, and it's very federally focused. It doesn't have a lot of room for institutional flexibility. I love to point out, schools are the number one source of grant funding in the country.

Megan Coval: That makes sense to me that that's where he would be, for some standardization but still not looking for full standardization.

Justin Draeger: And we announced in the conference last year, NASFAA also supports standardization, some standardization of award letters, terms, definitions, and

common elements that would have to be on. But then still leaving flexibility for schools to fill in.

Justin Draeger: FAFSA simplification, we've heard all of this before, we really need to see a bill and we've had conversations with his office about what a bill might look like. We testified in a hearing about a year and change ago about this. I'm feeling optimistic that we might have something, we're obviously not gonna get exactly what we would like. That's just politics, it's give and take. I'm feeling optimistic that there will be some balance given towards simplification and program integrity and giving schools ... we can't just go to a Pell Index. Schools need some indication of the underlying elements.

Justin Draeger: He also talked a lot about repayment rates and how we have so many and getting them down to fewer. But the automatic payroll withdrawal, and I know we've talked about that previously, but he really kinda threw his oomph behind that concept.

Justin Draeger: I did see that there was some concern out on the Twittersphere that automatic payroll withdrawal would prioritize student loan debt over maybe other expenses that people have. This concern that by automatically taking things out of somebody's paycheck, that they might need that money for other real basic living expenses.

Justin Draeger: A couple things about that. One is, this is supposed to be payroll withdrawal based on income-based repayment. So conceivably-

Megan Coval: That's what that protection is for.

Justin Draeger: Right, it's leaving the 150% of the poverty line. So, it's not taking a standardization loan amount.

Allie Bidwell: If you make very little then it's not gonna-

Megan Coval: That's the whole goal is not to make it, so you can't pay rent.

Justin Draeger: The other thing that's not clear, because we don't have legislation yet, is whether is this optional or required, and opt in or opt out. We don't know the answer to that just yet, but that obviously will also make a difference. If it's opt-in, then people can elect to do this or not. For my part, I almost, to the extent that I have to do less work, I almost always prefer, but I understand that I'm coming from a place of privilege on this matter that I'm not below or at poverty line.

Justin Draeger: So more to come on that. We have not seen legislation, and no legislation was released this week after his event, so a lot of these questions are still unanswered.

Allie Bidwell: One other question that I thought was kind of interesting that Jason Delisle brought up during the panel discussion from the following-

Justin Draeger: From AEI?

Allie Bidwell: From AEI, was the mechanics of how it would be set up. So, you graduate school and you go and take your first job at AEI. How does AEI know to take that out, or how would it be facilitated? Would it be between the agencies or ...

Justin Draeger: Not only that, all of this has to ... when you have any payroll deductions, people might not realize this, your employer takes that money and then the employer sends it to treasury. They're not divvying it out to Health and Human Services for Social Security savings and whatever other agencies. They send it to the state, they send it to the federal treasury-

Megan Coval: The big coffers and then they-

Justin Draeger: They have to sort it out. There's some backend work that would have to happen there too, because right now these are going to loan servicers.

Justin Draeger: The other piece he talked about was this accountability metric. We've talked a lot about accountability previously, lot of questions about if it's gainful employment for all but based on repayment rate, how do you define repayment rate, is it paid out in principle or is it actually just not delinquent or in default. But more interestingly, this last week there was a published article that looked at how accountability can sometimes run amuck. In this case, it was just college rankings that were having an influence on who could enroll in college. Do you wanna catch us up here, Megan?

Megan Coval: This was a study that was conducted by economist Caroline Hoxby and Sarah Turner who are at Stanford University and University of Virginia respectively. Basically, they were talking about how you ... a few years ago there was a lot of work being done on this concept of undermatching where lower income students they found were not applying to more selective institutions, and even when they thought they could have been academically prepared enough to do so. And combining that with at the same time how we've had, especially in the past few years, these lists that have come out that have, for lack of a better word, really been shameless, where institutions have been ... top ten schools that enrolled the least amount of Pell grant students, that type of thing.

Megan Coval: So they were talking about how the shameless are driving institutions to, yes, get more Pell students, but do it using bad measures. So basically, what they were showing is two different institutions that between 2008 and 2018, you see them enrolling toward the end of that period far more students below the Pell cutoff, but then there's this sharp decline right after the Pell cutoff. So, the point that they're making is, the schools are now just purely focused on students who are Pell eligible, which is not a bad thing, but those students right above, they

kind of are using 50,000 as the threshold, it goes dramatically down. They still have need.

Justin Draeger: So instead of an even distribution, this is sort of like, newsflash. Entities, players, organizations, schools respond to incentives. In some ways you look back and you say, "Well, this is predictable," but nobody predicted it. So what, all the middle income folks just fall out of the equation?

Megan Coval: Yeah, and it's right over the \$50,000 threshold. I hope we can link to this because this one chart is really telling, so it's just talking about ... the researchers looked at the pool of eligible students within each range of the university, and these are public institutions that they looked at, University of Connecticut and Maine. It's just talking about their goal is to serve the populations in their state and their area. They're leaving out this really important chunk of students.

Megan Coval: I think just to the accountability point, we have to be careful that the structures that we set up and incentives, because they can lead schools like, yes, the numbers are raised, but are they really doing better for the students in their area and moving the needle in that way? This study says no.

Justin Draeger: So, this leads me to my big question. This is the Superbowl of questions.

Megan Coval: Oh, boy. I'm nervous.

Allie Bidwell: That's a great analogy.

Justin Draeger: I'm just gonna keep using that all week.

Justin Draeger: Given how complicated a lot of these things are, we've talked about FAFSA simplification, we talked about the repayment and the employer withdrawal, and not the least of which is accountability, which another paper basically showing the unintended consequences and in this case, it wasn't even money. It's not like schools were receiving more or less money. These were like lists of shame ... and it drove behavior that on the one hand was good, but on the other had some negative consequences for middle income people who were just on the other side of the Pell cutoff.

Justin Draeger: So, you put all of that together, the odds of a reauthorization. Senator Alexander said he wants it done ... he talked about this year. Let's set that aside for just a second. The House and Senate both getting a full reauth done and then getting those reconciled within the year is a pretty tall order. Let's just say in the next eighteen months, which is about the legislative window we have before we are full-on ...

Allie Bidwell: 2020.

Justin Draeger: 2020. What do you think, Megan?

Megan Coval: I do not feel that we will have a full bill through and on the president's desk by Christmastime. I think there will be some significant progress-

Justin Draeger: What about next year? What about the first six months of 2020?

Megan Coval: Man, I feel like I don't wanna be the cynical, but I just feel like when you get into an election year, everything is...

Allie Bidwell: I'm there with you.

Justin Draeger: So, you're feeling pessimistic. Let me throw some more fire, some more logs in the pessimism fire here, because this is one thing I was looking at the other day. I'm looking at the help committee, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, okay? Let's count up the number of people on this committee alone who are running for president right now.

Megan Coval: Okay, one ...

Justin Draeger: So, Bernie Sanders. Okay, one. You said Elizabeth Warren, that's two. So, you've got those two. Then you've got ... Rand Paul is not running for president but has had presidential aspirations. And let's just say something insane happens on the Republican side. Rand Paul has done the presidential thing before. Mitt Romney, who has been speculated that if President Trump was going to get a primary challenger, Mitt Romney might be the Senator who would do it. So, I'm just gonna lump them in. I'm not saying they're running. But that's four.

Justin Draeger: Then you've got Tim Kaine, whose name is being floated. He was the VP pick previously. So that's five. Five people on this committee who have some fingers in the pot when it comes to presidential ambitions.

Justin Draeger: Now how likely are any of those people to compromise if they are thinking about presidential aspirations, and the platforms they need to adhere to first win a primary and then win a general?

Justin Draeger: It just seems really tough. And there's no reauthorization happening without an Elizabeth Warren signing on.

Megan Coval: Right, right.

Justin Draeger: And she has purposefully stayed on this committee because of her interest in these issues. It's not like this is just a tangential committee assignment.

Justin Draeger: I don't know. I think it's gonna be a tall order and I'm not gonna count out a reauthorization, but it's going to be a tall order.

Megan Coval: Yeah. And then not to mention all the Senate, I mean the whole House, but all the Senators who will be up for reelection and we just know it's the way it goes during an election year. They're kind of less likely to want to vote on anything big or that might be controversial, and there could easily, there will be things that will be controversial in an HEA.

Justin Draeger: The steam is picking up. If you were gonna take logs off that pessimism fire, the business round table which I think most people are familiar with, but they're the CEOs of major companies around the country. These are Fortune 500 companies. They employ thousands and thousands of people. They sent a letter and urged the Trump Administration and Congress to specifically work together on the Higher Education Act reauthorization. They said, "Action is needed on policies to strengthen education training pipeline so America's youth and working adults can secure fulfilling jobs." Et cetera et cetera et cetera.

Justin Draeger: In their letter, they said, "The 116th Congress and the administration can start by reauthorizing the Higher Education Act and incorporating key improvements to increase access to high quality, affordable education, and on the job training."

Justin Draeger: So, this is a group that doesn't necessarily or usually weigh ... trudge into higher education issues. You're talking about a bill that's now, what, twelve years? No, 10 years overdue? Eleven, no, 11 now in 2019 and 12 next year. Lot of different interests want to see this bill updated.

Justin Draeger: Alright, Allie, what you got?

Allie Bidwell: I have one thing and it's not really a "what was that?" but more of a shout out. Just with all of the reauthorization talk going on, what better time to talk about the importance of financial aid?

Justin Draeger: Heyo.

Allie Bidwell: And we've had-

Justin Draeger: Financial aid, is this Financial Aid Awareness Month?

Allie Bidwell: It's Financial Aid Awareness Month. And we've had some members sharing activities that they're doing on their campuses and I just wanted to share one that we heard from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, because I thought the name of their event was so creative and funny.

Allie Bidwell: So, they hosted a FAFSA workshop on campus and it was called, "Roses are red, donuts are yummy, do yourself a favor and apply for some money."

Megan Coval: Aww.

Justin Draeger: (laughter) Who came up with that? That could be our NASFAA poet laureate.

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, you want me to get you a name?

Justin Draeger: I mean, yeah.

Megan Coval: Could do a reading at the conference.

Allie Bidwell: To write a whole poem about the FAFSA or something?

Justin Draeger: Yeah, I like that. Side note to whoever did it, that's unpaid. But let's find out. Shout out to Texas A&M. What are some other campuses doing?

Allie Bidwell: UC Santa Barbara I know is holding a series of workshops and they're doing them in residence halls as a way to meet students where they are rather than dragging them into the aid office in a space where they're unfamiliar and maybe a little uncomfortable.

Justin Draeger: Right. So other schools that are doing things, please send them in. They tag us on social media, I assume?

Allie Bidwell: Yeah, tweet at us or post on our Facebook page.

Justin Draeger: Fantastic. Thanks everybody for listening. Join us again next week for another edition of "Off The Cuff." Send us your comments and your questions. Remember to subscribe and tell a friend. Till next time.