

NASFAA's "Off the Cuff" Podcast – Episode 311 Transcript

OTC Inside the Beltway: 2024-25 and 2025-26 FAFSA Updates and the 2024 Election

Speaker 1:

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Beth Maglione:

Hello and welcome to another episode of "Off the Cuff." I'm Beth Maglione, NASFAA interim president and CEO.

Jill Desjean:

I'm Jill Desjean with NASFAA's policy team.

Rachel Rotunda:

I'm Rachel Rotunda, also with NASFAA's policy team.

Nalia Medina:

And I'm Nalia Medina, also with NASFAA's policy team.

Beth Maglione:

Nalia, welcome. First recording?

Nalia Medina:

First recording, yes.

Beth Maglione:

Woo woo!

Nalia Medina:

It's taken me about two years, but it's my first one, so I'm excited to be here.

Beth Maglione:

Yay! We're excited to have you. Obviously, it's Halloween. This isn't my usual Thursday afternoon get up. And I also see that I'm the only one who came in costume, so wow.

Rachel Rotunda:

I was going to say, Beth, you win most spirited.

Nalia Medina:

Definitely.

Beth Maglione:

Just want to make sure everybody sees my ghost earrings.

Jill Desjean:

Aw!

Rachel Rotunda:

Those are extra special.

Beth Maglione:

I know. They're spooky and classy at the same time. You see that?

Nalia Medina:

Mm-hmm.

Rachel Rotunda:

Yep, the dangle. That is clear.

Beth Maglione:

What are you guys doing for Halloween?

Rachel Rotunda:

Jill, what are you doing?

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, Jill, what are you doing? I feel like you'll have most of the plans.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, my oldest has broken off from the crew. He's got a party to go to, short on details. So luckily, there's the group text of the 15-year-olds, and then this group text of their moms, and so he's all, "There's a party," and everything else, and I'm texting the moms like, "Does anyone know these people? Do they have parents?" So he's off doing his own thing. And then my littles, my daughter's going to have a buddy come over, and I'm going to trick or treat with them and with my younger son. But I have been told they're almost 12, they'll be 12 in two weeks, so I can go with them, but I need to sort of not be with them, hang back. So I'm just going to play it cool, wear my reflective vest, and I'll just look like an anonymous mom, not their mom.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, you don't want to spread your uncool to them.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah. Yeah. I did actually... This weekend, some friends told me that their son ranked the parents, and my husband and I were coolest parents.

Beth Maglione:

What?

Jill Desjean:

That's huge.

Beth Maglione:

Oh, my God.

Jill Desjean:

I literally was like, "What?"

Beth Maglione:

You just won the parenting Superbowl.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah. Yeah.

Beth Maglione:

Wow!

Jill Desjean:

Yeah. I'm just going to leave that out there for you all, so just [inaudible 00:03:00] revel in my glory.

Beth Maglione:

Oh, cool mom forever.

Jill Desjean:

Cool mom. That's right.

Beth Maglione:

Rachel and Nalia, what are you getting up to?

Rachel Rotunda:

We are staying in to pass out candy. We are in a new neighborhood in a new house to us, and so I feel like we're kind of flying blind. How many bags of candy do you get? How busy is it going to be? We've polled some of the neighbors to try to figure out how to prepare, and I think we're as prepared as we're going to be, so we're going to hang tight. I think we might go out on the porch to be like, "Hello, we are a welcoming house. Please come take this candy, so we aren't stuck with it for the next week," which would just be me eating it. So that's our plan.

Nalia Medina:

I am not doing much. I live in an apartment building, and we got candy the last two years. I figured maybe kids on all the floors would go through, and nothing. So I didn't get any candy this year, not dressing up. So I'm kind of just laying low here, watching Halloween movies.

Beth Maglione:

Ooh, anything in particular?

Nalia Medina:

I like a lot of the old Disney Halloween movies, like Halloweentown, like Twitches, some of those old ones.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, any Hocus Pocus fans?

Jill Desjean:

Oh, I like Hocus Pocus.

Beth Maglione:

Oh, yeah, it's so good.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah.

Beth Maglione:

And there was a new one, right? They did a Hocus Pocus 2, which I thought... I gave it a solid B-plus. Yeah.

Jill Desjean:

I don't know if I saw the second one.

Rachel Rotunda:

Pretty good for a sequel. B-plus.

Jill Desjean:

All right. Good to know.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, pretty good for a sequel.

Jill Desjean:

What are you up to, Beth?

Beth Maglione:

Oh, kids, kids. Kids stuff. The backyard is going to be a little pregame party. We eat chili, drink beer. The parents, not the children. They start eating candy then, and it goes on until they crash at 9:00 PM, so I'm anticipating a really terrible morning tomorrow. But yeah, they're just going to hit the neighborhood up. My son's exactly like yours. He's like, "You can come, but stay really far from me, please."

And I'm like, "Okay. I'll just be like your security detail. It's fine."

Jill Desjean:

Right, right.

Beth Maglione:

And yeah, he's going to be a zombie. My daughter's going to be an axolotl. Do you all know what that is?

Rachel Rotunda:

I can't say I do.

Jill Desjean:

Weirdly, I do.

Beth Maglione:

It's an endangered South American amphibian that has a really cute face.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, it's like the new capybara, right? It's the new hot animal.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, if you don't know what an axolotl is, look it up. They're remarkably cute little creatures.

Jill Desjean:

Max's zombie looks amazing. I saw that in Slack. Who did that makeup?

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, I did that makeup, but I want to be clear, I got a cheat, and it's awesome. This year at Target, we found these temporary tattoos that look like disgusting wounds. So I just tattooed his face with these temporary tattoos, and we did a dry run earlier in the week for some other event they had. And the only downside is I have to hold him down and scrub them off of his head, so he doesn't look like he's the walking wounded, basically. So again, tomorrow's going to be...

Rachel Rotunda:

The best day ever?

Beth Maglione:

Yeah. Well, in maybe not so ghoulish news, there's been some FAFSA stuff going on. Yep.

Jill Desjean:

Yep.

Beth Maglione:

Jill, do you want to talk a little bit about the latest on that front?

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, so the department put out an electronic announcement, an EA yesterday, we're recording on Thursday, so this was on Wednesday the 30th, with some new and updated resources for the 25-26 FAFSA cycle. Sort of the key info that was in here was that the department reiterated that they feel like they're on track for December 1's sort of broad release, so the release to everyone, which is good news because that's a date we've been banking on. So good to hear that they still feel like they're on track.

Other pieces of critical news, they're staffing up the Federal Student Aid Information Center, so the call center when students are struggling to fill out the FAFSA, the people who are answering the phone on that end. Last year, we know from the GAO that only about 25% of calls to the FSAIC got answered, and so the department is staffing up by more than 80%, and they also are going to be adding evening and weekend hours, which we and other college access organizations had pushed hard for. So all good news.

And they also announced in there that FSA has fixed a number of bugs that they've identified through this beta testing process that started October 1 and is sort of going through the December 1 launch, and the bugs are being fixed for 24-25 and 25-26, which is good news I feel like. Yes, that deserves some claps.

It's a weird thing. So much focus has been on 25-26, and for college access people, they've sort of moved on, but for financial aid administrators, we're very much in 24-25. And so it has felt a little bit like have they just abandoned 24-25? And so it's nice to know as they're identifying issues in 25-26 beta testing, they're going back and fixing those issues in 24-25 as well. So good news for students who are still filling out their FAFSAs for this year, as well as for the students who'll be filling it out next year.

The EA also reiterated the availability of some resources that had been unveiled earlier this week and previous to that, things like the FAFSA preview presentation, which is screenshots of the 25-26 FAFSA to help college access professionals, financial aid professionals to be able to help students to prepare to fill out the FAFSA, so for financial aid nights, things like that. The FAFSA prototype was listed in there. There's a new FAFSA road map with the key dates having to do with beta testing and the December 1 launch. There are some new applicant-facing materials, sort of the parent wizard that's part of the FAFSA. They've made a one-pager, so that students can kind of go through that, "Who is my parent thing," before they're actually in the FAFSA, a resource on creating the FSA ID, and some YouTube videos have been posted.

And lastly, the department is going to be having a webinar next Friday, so November 8th, that's called FAFSA: Preparing for 25-26 and Updates for the 24-25 Form. And registration for that is not required in advance, so if you go to the FSA page and check out that EA from yesterday, you'll see the link to just join that webinar next week, and it's late in the day on Friday next week, so everyone will sure bring a lot of great energy to that.

Beth Maglione:

Well, cheers to 24-25 and 25-26 bug fixes. Hallelujah.

Jill Desjean:

Mm-hmm. Yes, indeed.

Beth Maglione:

Not to dredge up past trauma, but I have been comparing this time of year to this time a year ago, and it feels to me very different. But I'm curious to know how it feels to you watching this process unfurl. This time last year, we had deadlines coming up. The day for the deadline would come. We would say, "Where is the thing?" The thing was not available, the thing was partially available. It just felt like a lot of last minute bad news. This feels to me very much like we've got plans in place. I see the plans sort of one by one getting ticked off, and me as an implementer, good Lord, I love that. So I'm like, "Okay, they set this one up and knocked it down. They set this one up and knocked it down too." So it's just a very different feeling right now than it was going into 24-25 for me. What do you all think?

Jill Desjean:

I'd agree with that. It definitely seems like a more deliberate approach. Last year felt like scramble, and so they had no communications plan because I think they were just entirely focused on, "Just make something happen, make something happen, make something happen." And this just seems a lot more like, "Okay, we're going to make something happen. We're going to go about it following this series of steps. We're going to make sure A works before we go to B, and we're going to communicate throughout." So if nothing else, the communication has just been so much more proactive in letting us know what's going on, as opposed to us just saying, "What's happening over there?" which felt like last year.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, I understand why a lot of our members are puck shy after the trauma that we've delineated in what is it now, an eight-page bulleted document that we publish about all the things that went haywire? That's a long document.

Jill Desjean:

Mm-hmm. Updates coming next week.

Beth Maglione:

Go to NASFAA.org to see it. Yeah. Oh, great. Good, look for that in TN then.

But yeah, I think all signs point to an improved rollout, for sure, so that is great news.

Actually, before we transition into the next topic, Nalia, can you sort of introduce yourself and what you do at NASFAA?

Nalia Medina:

Sure. So like I mentioned, I sit on our policy team, and a few months ago kind of transitioned into a new role as Assistant Director of Government Relations, which I'm very excited about. So I'm kind of leading our in-person government relations work here in DC and on the Hill, so very excited to be in this new role and to keep our policy and advocacy efforts on the Hill.

Beth Maglione:

Thank you. Yeah, we're glad to have you on the Hill as point person. And as such, we're going to ask you to give a little update about presidential election, what's going on and what it might mean for financial aid.

Nalia Medina:

Yeah, when I was thinking through this, I realized it's my first time living in DC during a presidential election, so I feel like everything I'm reading, watching, everywhere I go, it's all being consumed by the presidential election. I was in college in DC during 2020, but I was home because of the pandemic, so this is my first time being physically here, and I think it's obviously very top of mind for folks, the election just a few days away. And I think especially when it comes to our work, higher ed financial aid, I think a lot of people are looking to see what either administration would be doing in that space. We recently, I think a few weeks ago, put out some articles on what a Harris administration would mean for our work, what a Trump administration would mean for our work. So I think right now, we're kind of watching to see how the election plays out and what that would mean for our work moving forward.

Beth Maglione:

Got it. To be clear, I know we've said this on the podcast before, but NASFAA is a nonpartisan organization because we want to and have to work with anybody who's in office. We have to work with any administration. We have to work with any Congress. So we wait, we sort of prognosticate what it might mean for our programs based on evidence and written statements, and then we try and think about how we can fit our advocacy goals and objectives into that as we move forward. So that's the position we take.

So as we look at a future either Harris or Trump administration, I'm curious to know what we think things could play out like. So Nalia, would you tell us a little bit about... Let's start with Harris. What do you think we need to be on the look for with a Harris administration?

Nalia Medina:

I think with a potential Harris administration, she'd be in somewhat of an interesting position, and I think that a lot of people just broadly are looking to see if she will continue some of the Biden administration's policies and initiatives or if we'll see a slight deviation of some of those priorities, again, more broadly, but also higher ed and financial aid specifically.

I think throughout her campaign recently, we've seen her highlight some initiatives like addressing student loan debt, which we know has been a huge priority for the Biden administration, kind of dating back to 2022 when they released that original proposal for debt cancellation, and everything they've done since then to keep that moving through different channels. We've also seen her mention wanting to make college more affordable, and we saw that \$900 increase to the Pell Grant during their first two years in office. So I think one thing that is interesting to me will be to watch out if Harris will commit to doubling Pell the same way that Biden did, which is one of our key policy and advocacy areas at NASFAA.

Something else that she has also mentioned during this campaign is wanting to invest in HBCUs and MSIs. And I think as a graduate from Howard University, I think this issue kind of fits close to home for her as an HBCU grad, so I think there's some potential to get some things moving there. And back in 2020 when she ran for president the first time, one of her policy priorities during that campaign included tuition-free community college, so I think it's also possible that that issue comes up at one point. And even before she got to the White House as Vice President, she was Attorney General of California and had a history in that role and a proven track record of cracking down on for-profit colleges

and universities that were misrepresenting information to recruit vulnerable students, so I think there's also an opportunity for her to maybe do some work in that space as well.

Beth Maglione:

Got it. Thank you. And you mentioned this Nalia, but I'll point folks back to the Harris administration article that we did, and we can put that in the show notes as well. Can you talk a little bit about student loan forgiveness?

Nalia Medina:

Yeah, I think we'll also be talking a little bit more about this later in the podcast, and I'd welcome Jill or Rachel to jump in here as well. But the Biden administration did just release a draft of its proposed regulations to provide student loan debt forgiveness for borrowers experiencing financial hardship. And I did mention that we saw the initial proposal back, I believe it was 2022, that would cancel student loan debt for certain borrowers if they met certain income thresholds.

But that proposal we saw has faced quite a lot of legal challenges in the last several weeks and months. And so those proposed regulations, that's part of the administration's effort to keep that moving through the negotiated rulemaking process. And I believe the proposed regulations were published just a few days ago, I believe. I don't have the date off the top of my head, but I think that means the fate of the program will likely be in the hands of the next presidential administration. And I know that Jill will probably talk a little bit about that as well, but I think that's a bit of context there on the student loan debt space.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah. What would that look like, Jill? How would a new presidential administration impact those proposed rules?

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, it's hard to say. There's quite a few ways it could go, depending on which way the elections pan out. It's always easier when you have one incumbent at least because it's like at least you know how things will go if the election goes one way because we'll just continue with whatever they planned. But when we've got two candidates, neither of whom is an incumbent, not entirely sure. But basically as Nalia mentioned, the proposed rule that released just today, October 31st, the official proposed rule got put in the Federal Register today, there needs to be a 30-day comment period. So that puts us to the end of November.

Then the department actually has to read all those comments and incorporate their responses to those comments into a final rule, figure out if they need to change anything from the proposed to the final. That takes time as well. It would be a lot for this administration to do before the inauguration, but I suppose it is possible. And if they did that, they would probably want to set this for early implementation before the inauguration, at least the piece that doesn't require an application, which is a good-sized chunk of this. Some of this forgiveness would be automatic for borrowers that the department has pre-identified.

I'd guess that would be Biden's plan if Trump wins next week. If they've gone this far, I assume they want to do something before the inauguration. Otherwise, with final rules not published before the inauguration, if Trump were to win next week, they would just basically abandon this effort. They would never publish a final rule, and that would just sort of drop this entirely.

Whereas if Harris wins next week, she hasn't said whether her plans definitely include continuing with these efforts, but it's a lot more likely that she would than Trump would. But her options are the same as Trump's. She could also just abandon the effort by not publishing a final rule, go some other way, or she could just see this through, make the rule final, and implement it.

And this, of course, is all assuming that these rules don't face any legal challenges because this is that financial hardship piece of the broader student debt relief rulemaking session that happened over the course of late 2023, early 2024. So proposed rules for most of these provisions came out last April and are on hold, cannot be published as final, due to they're joined by the courts. So presumably, this piece is not any less controversial than anything else. So I think also in the mix here is the potential for some kind of legal challenge that would stop either administration from publishing final rules or implementing anything. So lots of balls in the air on this and really hard to tell what might happen.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, it sounds like a lot of dependencies, a lot of unknowns.

Let's turn the page to the potential Trump administration, and maybe Rachel, could you kick us off by talking about some key initiatives a Trump administration might have for financial aid?

Rachel Rotunda:

Sure. So as Nalia mentioned earlier, we really haven't seen a super detailed higher ed and certainly not financial aid specific plan from either campaign. So what we know about a potential second Trump administration really comes largely from what we saw during the first time he was in office between 2017 and 2020. So what we would expect is probably a continuation from his first administration, although we could see some new initiatives rolled out. So one of the things that we saw last time was deregulation, so rolling back sort of the federal government's role when it comes to higher ed. We would probably expect to see the rolling back of a lot of the existing Biden administration policies, some of which could come through executive action, and some of which might require their own rulemaking process to kind of undo what the Biden administration has put in place over the last few years. As Jill just alluded to, I think we would probably expect to see some rolling back of various student loan initiatives that we've seen be a major priority for the Biden administration over the last several years.

Thinking about some of the other things that President Trump was supportive of and that his administration advanced during his term, things like focusing on workforce development and alternatives to a more traditional four-year college experience. So a focus on things like apprenticeships and vocational training, that's something we've also definitely seen from congressional Republicans over the last several years.

We also saw during the first Trump administration a lot of proposed funding cuts when it comes to the student aid programs. So that's something that we would be looking for in future budget proposals if Trump were to win. Those proposals that we saw during the Trump administration were rejected by Congress. We did not see significant cuts to the student aid programs, but it is, of course, notable that those proposals were included in the budget request. And we have seen some pretty concerning proposals coming out of the House Appropriations Committees over the last couple of years to either fully eliminate the campus-based aid programs, cut funding for those programs in half. So funding, I would say, is an area where we would expect to be keeping at least a really close eye on what a Trump administration might be proposing.

We also saw some efforts during the first Trump administration around things like free speech on college campuses and title IX reforms, so that's something that we could see a President Trump pick up if he were to win the election.

Accountability is another area. I think this is increasingly a bipartisan issue. It's just that each party kind of takes their own spin on things like accountability, but we could expect to see more scrutiny on colleges and universities around things like postgraduate earnings and repayment rates.

And then finally, something that as Nalia was talking about, what a Harris administration might look like, something that came to mind for me is kind of a point of connection, I think, between the two candidates is their focus on support for HBCUs. That is an area that we saw the Trump administration put a lot of focus around during his term. We saw increased funding proposals. We saw him sign in an executive order back in 2017 that sort of aimed to really bolster the connection between the federal government and HBCUs. So I think it is interesting that there are a couple of areas where we might see the candidates take different approaches, but they have some overlap in terms of what their focus and their priorities might be.

So it's always hard to read the tea leaves when you don't know who's going to win, and you don't know how their priorities may have changed since they were a candidate to being a president, but that's a little bit about what we could expect to see from a Trump administration.

Beth Maglione:

Thank you. And again, we have an article about what a second Trump term could mean for financial aid, so we will post that with the Harris article in our show notes. Actually, before we turn completely off of this topic, Rachel, what would you expect after the election in terms of a presidential transition? How does that kind of play out with a new administration?

Rachel Rotunda:

Yeah, it's a great question, and I feel like I've been trying to think back to what this time was like back in late 2020, early 2021. So after an election, there is a formal transition process that takes place, and I don't know that the public always knows that this is going on. It's sort of like the election happens, at some point it's called, and then the next thing you hear about it is usually Inauguration Day. So there will be a presidential transition team in place for whichever candidate wins. This team is charged with a number of different things. At this point in time, I would expect that both campaigns already have those teams sort of at least tapped, ready to go because this work really picks up as soon as there's a winner of the election. This team will do things like coming up with a plan for what the transition process will look like.

A big part of their role is filling key staffing positions, so that can include cabinet level positions, as well as key advisors, thinking about how to flesh out in a little bit more detail the incoming president's policy agenda, planning for the administration's first budget request. So they're really charged with taking the candidate from a candidate the day after election day or whenever the election is called to Inauguration Day and even a little bit beyond. And I think the really key thing to remember in terms of our work is that this is going to take time. And so after the election and before the inauguration, we will start seeing some public announcements about key positions and political appointees at the White House, at the Department of Education, but it can be a slower process.

So I looked back, and Secretary Cardona, his appointment was announced December 22nd, 2020, so about I guess a month and a half or so after the election. And then he was confirmed March 1st, so after President Biden had already been inaugurated. We would expect to see agencies like the Department of Education come into Inauguration Day with some staffing in place. So there will be staffing announcements about political appointees that will happen between election day and the inauguration, but it might be a little bit kind of bare bones until later in the spring. So throughout the late winter, early spring, we'll see more and more staffing happening over at the department. This also could depend on

which candidate wins. I mean, theoretically, I guess there's more potential for crossover in staffing between a Biden and a Harris administration than there may be between a Biden and a Trump administration, just because of the change in party.

And then the other thing I wanted to mention is that we could see some big announcements in terms of the new administration's policy agenda happening in those first days and weeks. I mean, I think most of us can probably picture when that first day the president's inaugurated, and they usually go to the White House and sign a whole stack of executive orders. So that stuff will happen, but it may take a number of weeks, months, into the spring and maybe even the summer before we have a really good sense of what the new administration's higher ed priorities are going to be.

So we saw the Biden administration publish their kind of first draft of their Build Back Better agenda, which was that big domestic policy package in March of 2021. So that was a couple of months after he was inaugurated, and that did include a lot of higher ed priorities that ultimately were never signed into law, but it was certainly a big messaging document. And then we would also expect to see the new administration's first budget proposal come a little bit later in the spring than what we would typically expect. So normally, we look for that in late February, early March. We would probably expect to see that maybe later in April or May. I think the Biden administration's came out towards the end of May back in 2021.

So that's a little bit about kind of what to expect post-election. It is a different year when you have a new president coming in and a new Congress along with that.

Beth Maglione:

One thing I want to touch on just real quickly is sort of how NASFAA builds its advocacy positions as a nonpartisan organization, how we engage in this process. And if you all could sort of talk really up high from a 36,000-foot level about that.

Jill Desjean:

Yeah, so I can talk about how we develop our policy positions. We don't just make them up on the policy team. We engage our whole membership, we engage our board, and so it's proactive, and it's reactive. We've got sort of our evergreen issues, just like we always want more money in the student aid programs. That doesn't go away. We don't need to check with our members and make sure that they're cool with that. That's something we're always behind and always pushing for.

But sometimes things bubble up. We just hear an issue becoming very popular, and we don't have a policy position on it, and we recognize that we need to have one because we'll start seeing proposed legislation, or we'll start seeing papers coming out of other policy organizations out there. And we'll say, "Okay, we need to develop a position ourselves, so that we can advocate for or against this, or to best meet the needs of our members and the students that they serve." So in those cases, we might pull together a task force or a thought force to really think through the issue. We make sure we get diverse representation from all of our regions, depending on what the issue is, from people who represent graduate students, undergraduate students, community colleges, four-year colleges, whatever it might be, whoever's voice is important to be heard in whatever issue.

And then we basically come up with a list of recommendations out of that, bring them to the board, make sure the board is okay with them, and adopt those as our official policy positions, which we're then taking up to the Hill. And maybe I'll take let Rachel or Nalia kind of pick up on what we do with those once we're up there talking with lawmakers and how we make sure we advocate our advocacy positions.

Nalia Medina:

Yeah, I can jump in here. I think with those policy priorities or recommendations that Jill just kind of outlined, our policy team, like Rachel and I, we spent a lot of time on the Hill, we are very intentional about meeting with all members on Capitol Hill across the aisle, Democrats and Republicans, Independents. We are very intentional about that because we understand that we are representing over 29,000 financial aid administrators from all across the country. So we're very intentional about that.

And just with this presidential election coming up, we're actually working on what we're calling a presidential transition document where we are pulling together some of our top NASFAA policy priorities that we think is important for the next presidential administration, regardless of who wins, that we think is important for them to focus on, as well as the new session of Congress, the 119th session. This is something that we did back in 2020 when President Biden's administration was starting. And in terms of timing, we really just want to ensure that we're getting this in the hands of the transition team of the new administration, getting it in the right hands of those folks who will be going into office.

But one thing that we're always thinking about is how can we be helpful to new members on the Hill, regardless of party, how we can be helpful to their new staff on the Hill if it's their first time. So we do a lot in our policy and advocacy efforts to ensure that we can be helpful to them. We put a document together at the start of the 118th Congress that we call our financial aid one-on-one syllabus that we have shared with every Hill office that we've met with, again, Democrat, Republican, or Independent, that kind of pulls together different resources that we have at NASFAA, pulls together those policy recommendations and priorities that Jill highlighted. So sharing that with everyone that we meet with, regardless party. And whenever we bring our members to Capitol Hill as well, we are always intentional about bringing folks from different states, so that we can meet with their representatives and senators and ensuring that we are reaching members from across the political aisle.

Rachel Rotunda:

One thing I would add there, Nalia, as you were talking that came to mind, is I feel like sometimes we'll have NASFAA members who will say, "I'm really passionate about this issue, but I'm not sure that Senator So-and-so or Representative So-and-so will be receptive to it based on how they've voted in the past, or press releases, or whatever it might be. And should we even bother taking this issue to them?" And at NASFAA, we will take our issues and our positions to any office. Of course, we're going to maybe bring an issue to an office that we know has already a vested interest in that issue, maybe they've supported a bill. We're going to adapt our advocacy to be as effective as possible based on what the member is interested in, but we do not shy away from taking a certain topic, or an issue, or position that we have to an office just because we're not sure how they might react. We will take the same issue, the same position, to a Democratic office, to a Republican office.

And something that I have always found really interesting is that more often than not, the office that you expect maybe won't be super interested or might express disagreement is actually pretty open-minded. And we've actually had instances where taking that issue, something that one of our members is really passionate about advocating around to a certain office will actually lead to a great partnership, and we might even have a draft bill come out of that interaction. So just want to reiterate with folks that we don't change our positions based on who we're meeting with. The positions are what they are because they're developed through the process that Jill outlined with member input and our board's input. And we just say it's our job to advocate for what we think is best for students and for the community, regardless of the audience that we're advocating in front of.

Nalia Medina:

And I'll just quickly add on, I did mention our presidential transition document that we're working on, did just want to flag for folks that you can expect that I would say in the next month or so. Again, we want to see what happens with the election, so that we're getting it in the hands of those who need to see it. But yeah, you can expect that in the next month or so, and we will also be making updates to that financial aid one-on-one syllabus document in the coming weeks as well.

Beth Maglione:

Yeah, thank you. And just to throw on top of that, if you want to dig deeper into where NASFAA is in their advocacy for institutions, programs, and students, go to the advocacy section of [NASFAA.org](https://www.nasfaa.org). There's a page about our various positions, where we've been on the record, and even advocacy resources if you're interested in doing some of your own advocacy work.

All right. Thank you for that. Last question. I think we're getting near time here. Are we expecting any shakeups in Congress, and what's NASFAA keeping an eye on in terms of Congressional elections and how a new Congress could impact the appropriations process, for example?

Nalia Medina:

Yeah, really good question. Like we talked about at the beginning, I think the presidential election is really top of mind for folks, but I do want to highlight the importance of these congressional elections as well, because if we want to get anything done and make any changes to the law, that will need to go through Congress. So right now, what we're seeing is that the House and the Senate are also up for grabs. So on the Senate side, there are about over 30 seats up for election, about 10 Republican seats, 19 Democratic seats, and four Independent seats.

What we're looking out in terms of the Senate elections right now is really what will happen. I think what's most relevant to us is the Senate Help committee. That's where a lot of our higher ed financial aid issues fall into. So I think we're looking out to see what will happen with that committee leadership, depending on whether Democrats hold the Senate, or if it flips to Republican control. Right now, that committee is led by Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont, and Senator Bill Cassidy from Louisiana is the ranking member and the lead Republican there. So I think we're just waiting to see what happens with that committee and its leadership, depending on what happens there with those elections.

And then on the House side, all 435 seats are up for election there. So what we are paying attention to there is whether Democrats will flip the house or if Republicans will retain control. And we work closely with the Ed and Workforce Committee. That's kind of where our issues fall into. So Chairwoman Virginia Foxx from North Carolina, she is the chairwoman of that committee, and Bobby Scott from Virginia is the ranking member and lead Democrat on that committee. What we do know right now is that regardless of what happens with the elections, Congresswoman Virginia Foxx has announced that she will be stepping down from leading this committee. So we will kind of be looking to see who the new Republican member will be to lead that committee.

So I think in terms of shakeups, that's what we're kind of watching out for, especially with the committee leadership. But more broadly, what we're seeing right now is that members of Congress are in recess and have been in recess for the whole month of October, and they will be back in session the week after the election, I believe. So that period after the November election and the start of the new Congress is what is called the lame duck period, and I think that is a period where we could potentially see a lot happen, particularly with the budget and appropriations process.

So for fiscal year 2025, that budget and appropriations process is still ongoing. Funding has been extended until December 20th. And so Congress will need to finalize the budget and appropriations process for fiscal year 2025 either during that lame duck period after the election and before the start of the new Congress, or they will need to pass another funding extension to avoid a government shutdown, which that then could push the appropriations process into the next Congress. But I would say that we're fairly optimistic that we could avoid that government shutdown, whether they kind of finalize it during that lame duck period or pass another funding extension.

Beth Maglione:

All right. Whew, we've got a lot going on, a lot to keep our eye on in the next week and the coming months. It's going to be an interesting time.

So thanks for tuning into the latest episode of "Off the Cuff." Be sure to send us your comments, and remember to subscribe to us on your platform of choice. And we will be chatting with you again soon. Thanks so much.