

Questions for the Record
“Nominations”
Hearing Date: November 15, 2017

James Blew, of Valencia, CA, nominated to be Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Department of Education

Questions for the Record from Senator Elizabeth Warren

1. If confirmed, you would play a key role in constructing the U.S. Department of Education’s (“the Department”) annual budget request. The Department’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget significantly divested in education, cutting more than \$9 billion in federal education dollars, completely eliminating critical programs that help Massachusetts, and cutting federal student loans by \$143 billion over ten years, which would make college more unaffordable for more students. Do you believe the federal government should be investing more or less in education?

Are there cuts in the Department’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget with which you personally disagreed? If so, which ones?

I am generally aware of the President’s FY 2018 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Education. However, I was not at the Department during the development of that Budget Request, so it would not be appropriate for me to comment on it. If confirmed, I look forward to working with our budget service office within OPEPD, as well as others within the department, regarding future budget requests to serve students, parents, and taxpayers.

2. The Department’s Fiscal Year 2018 budget also sent hundreds of millions more dollars to school privatization vouchers and policies. Do you believe federal taxpayer dollars should generally stay in public education?

I believe that we should defer as much as possible to states and local school districts to determine how to best allocate federal funding for education, so long as those decisions comply with federal law.

3. How would you use your position to ensure that future budget requests help make college more affordable for students?

It would be inappropriate for me at this time to speak to the budget process and what may or may not happen in a particular situation. These issues are extremely important, and I would not want to speculate about them. I can assure you, if confirmed, I will be thorough in my review and thoughtful in my determinations and suggestions to the Secretary.

4. How would you use your position to ensure that future budget requests help student loan borrowers with their student debt burden?

It would be inappropriate for me at this time to speak to the budget process and what may or may not happen in a particular situation. These issues are extremely important, and I would not want to speculate about them. I can assure you, if confirmed, I will be thorough in my review and thoughtful in my determinations and suggestions to the Secretary.

5. Last year's budget proposed to totally eliminate public service loan forgiveness. Do you support federal student loan forgiveness for people in public service?

It would be inappropriate for me at this time to speak to the budget process and what may or may not happen in a particular situation. These issues are extremely important, and I would not want to speculate about them. I can assure you, if confirmed, I will be thorough in my review and thoughtful in my determinations and suggestions to the Secretary.

6. Last year's budget also rolled back the student loan subsidies for low-income college students. This means that federal student loans would be more expensive for more students—especially our lowest income students—pushing them even deeper into debt for even longer. Will you oppose policies that make college more expensive for low-income students or push more low-income students deeper into debt?

Each of these four questions is very important, and they are currently under discussion in Congress as part of the Higher Education Act reauthorization. At this time, it would be inappropriate for me to speak to any of them before the Senate acts on my confirmation or before I can consult with the Secretary. I can assure you that, if confirmed, I will investigate the issues thoroughly and provide my considered recommendations on each to the Secretary.

7. If confirmed, your office would help set the Department's policy position in federal rulemaking. In your view, what is the appropriate role for federal regulations and rulemaking?

If confirmed, I will work, as appropriate within my role, with officials from Department offices considering rulemaking, to help determine when regulations would be appropriate. Consistent with applicable law and recent Executive Orders, I believe that rules should be promulgated only when necessary and consistent with congressional authority. In promulgating regulations, it is important to consider the interests of both taxpayers and stakeholders, and ensure that rules are fiscally wise-- do not impose costs that exceed benefits—and do not cause unintended consequences.

8. Do you believe the Department should do what it can within the law to strengthen accountability and transparency for K12 and higher education through its regulatory authority?

If I confirmed, I will work with Department officials to review these areas and help determine when or if regulations would be appropriate.

9. What do you think the Department can do to better protect students from colleges—particularly for-profit colleges—with abysmal graduation rates, low loan repayment rates, and incredibly high default rates? What specific actions do you believe the Department could take to make these colleges more accountable for delivering a good, affordable education for their students?

As previously stated, it would be inappropriate for me to put forward statements that will be associated with the Department of Education before such time I may be honored with confirmation.

10. What are some of your specific ideas and plans for increasing higher education accountability at the Department?

If I am confirmed, I will work with the appropriate offices within the Department to ensure I have the breadth of information necessary to make such recommendations to the Secretary should she request my advice on these matters.

11. What are some of your specific ideas and plans for increasing higher education transparency at the Department?

If I am confirmed, I will work with the appropriate offices within the Department to ensure I have the breadth of information necessary to make such recommendations to the Secretary should she request my advice on these matters.

12. I have worked with Senators Hatch, Whitehouse, and Cassidy to introduce *The College Transparency Act of 2017*,¹, bipartisan legislation to strengthen higher education transparency for students, families, and policy makers. This legislation overturns the ban on student unit record data collection, while safeguarding student privacy and data security. Do you believe Congress should overturn the ban on student unit record data collection if privacy and security are properly protected?

Transparency is a guiding principle for me, tempered only by the need for student privacy and data security. At this time, it would be inappropriate for me to render an opinion on any specific proposals. If confirmed, I would carefully review all of the relevant facts and considerations and, if asked, provide the Secretary with my opinion and recommendations.

13. Do you believe the Department has a responsibility to ensure that Title IV institutions of higher education provide a good education for students that will not leave them drowning in debt for useless degrees? If so, please describe your view on the Department's responsibilities when it comes to the use of taxpayer dollars, including dollars distributed under Title IV of the Higher Education Act?

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1121>

As the Secretary has stated, students are her first priority, and should have multiple pathways to pursue postsecondary education. Should I be confirmed, I will aggressively adhere to that mission.

14. Please discuss your views on the role of Congress in conducting oversight of the Department of Education.

I appreciate and respect the oversight responsibilities of members of Congress and this Committee. If confirmed, I will in my role work with the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs to be as responsive as possible to all Congressional oversight inquiries in a timely, accurate, and thoughtful way.

If you have any questions, then please contact Josh Delaney in my office at (202) 224 – 4543.