



MARCH FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Legislative Overview

On March 7, President Biden paid a visit to Congress to deliver his final State of the Union address prior to the November elections. The address covered a wide range of issues, both foreign and domestic. He also emphasized the importance of ensuring families have access to affordable childcare and restoring the Child Tax Credit expansion. Republican Senator Katie Britt of Alabama delivered the Republican response and mentioned the “sky-high childcare costs” that many families are currently struggling with.

President Biden signed a \$1.2 trillion spending package that lumps together the remaining six annual spending bills to fund parts of the government through the end of September. The President’s signature marked the culmination of a lengthy budget process that included the passage of four stopgap measures by Congress. The bill, released a few weeks ago and over 1,000 pages in all, passed the House of Representatives on a 286-to-134 vote with more than half of Republicans voting against the spending measure. The Senate then passed the bill on a 74-to-24 vote to send it to the President’s desk.

The package includes nearly \$62 billion in total discretionary resources for Homeland Security, which was the most contentious of the appropriation bills that lawmakers were negotiating. It would include nearly \$59 billion for non-defense programs and more than \$3 billion for defense-related programs. US Customs and Border Protection would receive nearly \$20 billion, an increase of \$3 billion from the prior fiscal year. It would provide \$495 million to bring the number of Border Patrol agents to 22,000, the highest number ever funded, and \$20 million to hire an additional 150 officers to support counter-fentanyl efforts. It would bolster funding for processing capacity, medical care and the support of children’s well-being, but it does not provide money for a border wall. It increases funding for Transportation Security Administration personnel by more than \$1 billion.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement would receive close to \$10 billion. More than \$721 million would be provided for transportation and removal operations of people who no longer have a legal basis to remain in the US or who pose a security or safety risk, nearly \$292 million more than in President Joe Biden's budget. It would increase the number of detention beds to 41,500, which is 7,500 more beds than funded in the prior fiscal year, as part of more than \$3 billion for custody operations, the highest amount ever appropriated. The package would also boost funding for countering fentanyl and human smuggling investigations, non-intrusive inspection technology and staff to assist with the management and processing of those on the non-detained and detained dockets. US Citizenship and Immigration Services would receive \$281 million, including \$160 million for refugee processing, asylum and work authorization backlog reduction. The Federal Emergency Management Agency would receive more than \$25 billion, nearly \$73 million below the prior fiscal year.

The bill also provides \$824 billion for defense, an increase of nearly \$27 billion from fiscal year 2023. It would hike basic military pay by 5.2%, the largest boost in more than 20 years. It would also beef up the basic allowance for housing by 5.4% and an allowance for meals by 1.7%. Plus, it would continue funding for suicide prevention and sexual assault programs. The package would provide \$300 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative to aid the nation against Russian aggression. The funding is separate from a larger assistance package for Ukraine that is currently bogged down on Capitol Hill. It also would preserve the agency's travel policy to allow service members and their families access to reproductive health care. And it would cut nearly \$51 million from diversity and inclusion programs, rolling back support to fiscal year 2021 levels. The bill would also increase military funding for Taiwan to \$300 million. The funds come from the State Department's foreign military financing program. Last year, the US approved funding through this program for the first time for Taiwan. The program is typically only used for sovereign nations – a move that angered China, which claims the self-governing island as its own.

The bill provides \$79 billion for the Department of Education, which is \$500 million less than the prior fiscal year. The amount is \$22 billion more than House Republicans proposed, but \$11 billion less than Biden's budget request. Nearly \$44 billion would be provided for K-12 education. About \$18.4 billion – an increase of \$20 million above fiscal year 2023 – would go to the Title I program, the largest federal funding source for K-12 schools. The package calls for nearly \$25 billion for federal student aid programs, equal to fiscal year 2023. This keeps the maximum Pell grant, the government's key aid program for low-income college students, at \$7,395 per person. There is an increase in funding for historically Black colleges and universities, known as HBCUs; Hispanic serving institutions; and tribally controlled colleges and universities. There is no new money for the free community college initiative that Biden has proposed, according to a summary provided by House Republicans.

The legislation includes \$143 million for disaster relief efforts at the Small Business Administration, the same amount as last year. The judiciary would receive nearly \$9 billion, an increase of \$169 million over the prior fiscal year. The package would also provide \$750 million for court security for justices, judges, their families and employees. It would also provide \$55 million for election security grants for states to combat voter fraud, maintain voter rolls and improve the administration and security of federal elections.

The package would provide nearly \$14 billion for the Labor Department, which is \$145 million below the prior fiscal year's level. The amount is nearly \$5 billion more than House Republicans proposed. It would provide more than \$10 billion for the Employment and Training Administration, slightly lower than the prior fiscal year, and \$1.9 billion for worker protection agencies, the same amount as in the last fiscal year's package.

The bill would provide more than \$117 billion for HHS. That would be \$14 billion more than House Republicans proposed, but \$12 billion below Biden's budget request. The Childcare and Development Block Grant, which provides child care assistance to low-income parents, would receive nearly \$9 billion, an increase of \$725 million from the last fiscal year. Head Start, which provides school readiness services to low-income families, would receive more than \$12 billion, a boost of \$275 million. The package would provide \$4 billion for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, an increase of \$25 million from the prior fiscal year. The National Institutes of Health would receive close to \$49 billion, an increase of \$300 million from the prior fiscal year, excluding mandatory funding from the 21st Century Cures Act. The National Cancer Institute and research on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias would receive funding boosts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would receive \$9 billion, with small increases in funding for safe motherhood and infant health, as well as food safety. The package would also provide additional money for mental health and substance abuse programs and services.

While budget talks have dominated the month of March on Capitol Hill, a group of Democratic and independent senators introduced a bill that would allow the federal government to request local authorities to detain immigrants, regardless of their legal status, charged with or convicted of violent crimes for deportation proceedings. This move underscores Democrats' focus on immigration enforcement ahead of the upcoming elections, prompted in part by recent incidents.

The Biden administration also introduced new race and ethnicity standards, combining Hispanic or Latino as one category and providing a separate checkbox for individuals of Middle Eastern or North African descent. Previously, Hispanics had to select from a separate list of races. The updated format allows individuals to select multiple categories that apply to their identity and includes examples for each category, with room for additional responses. This change is significant, as it allows millions of people from Middle Eastern or North African backgrounds to no longer classify themselves solely as "white" or "other" on census and other forms.

PLG Actions

Attorney Sean Pittman traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with Congressional members, as well as the executive branch during the month of March. Specifically, Sean met with House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, New Jersey Representative Donald Payne, and White House senior staff members. We continue to meet with members and key staffers to brief them on our representation of Miami-Dade and that we will be following up in the coming months with the issues and priorities of the County.