January 15, 2010

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The House met this morning for a five-minute pro forma session and will reconvene on Tuesday, January 19, following the observance of Martin Luther King Day on Monday. The chamber next week will consider suspensions and three bills dealing with Native American water rights.

The Senate also will reconvene on January 19, in pro forma session. Votes will be postponed to the following day, when the chamber is expected to consider judicial and executive branch nominations. Thereafter, the chamber is expected to begin debate on the House-passed statutory increase in the public debt limit (H. J. Res. 45), which is likely to take several days because there are no limits on debate.

Behind the scenes, House and Senate Democrats continue negotiations with the White House on a final health care package. CongressDaily reports that if negotiators can reach a compromise on the legislation and send the package to the Congressional Budget Office for scoring this week, House and Senate votes on the measure could take place the last week of January.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

AAU, ACE, APLU WEIGH IN ON HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION

AAU joined the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) on January 12 in writing to House and Senate leaders about the health care legislation currently being negotiated by the two houses of Congress and the White House.

The letter thanks Congress for addressing health care—“one of the most pressing and difficult issues of our time”—and requests “careful attention to and consideration of some key issues affecting research universities, including academic medical centers.”
The letter follows on and reinforces a separate letter sent to congressional leaders on January 8 by ACE President Molly Broad on behalf of the broader higher education community. It also supports recommendations made by the Association of American Medical Colleges in its December 30, 2009, letter to Congress.

The three associations’ letter requests that the final bill:

- Allow colleges and universities to continue to offer students group-like health insurance plans that are both high-quality and low-cost (the associations offered a specific proposal);
- Consider additional ways to insulate states from future increased Medicaid costs because of their impact on state funding for higher education and state-based student aid;
- Exclude False Claims Act provisions in the Senate-passed bill that would make research universities (among others) far more vulnerable to unfounded qui tam lawsuits;
- Increase the number of Graduate Medical Education training slots to “sufficiently meet the future demand for physicians”; and
- Limit the proposed cuts in Disproportionate Share Hospital payments in the absence of evidence demonstrating that future expanded health care coverage alleviates the need for such payments.

SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING ROUNDTABLE RELEASES REPORT, RECOMMENDATIONS  NEW

Federal research agencies should develop and implement policies that ensure free public access to the results of the research they fund “as soon as possible after those results have been published in a peer-reviewed journal,” according to a report issued January 12 by the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable.

The Roundtable, an expert panel of librarians, library scientists, publishers, and university academic leaders convened last summer by the House Committee on Science and Technology, in collaboration with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, was asked to examine the state of scholarly publishing and seek consensus recommendations for expanding public access to scholarly journal articles. It was chaired by AAU Executive Vice President John Vaughn.

The group’s recommendations, endorsed in full by an overwhelming majority of the panel (12 out of 14), “seek to balance the need for and potential of increased access to scholarly articles with the need to preserve the essential functions of the scholarly publishing enterprise.”

The Roundtable identified a set of principles viewed as essential to a robust scholarly publishing system, including the need to preserve peer review, the necessity of adaptable publishing business models, the benefits of broader public access, the importance of archiving, and the value of interoperability of online content.

The report, its accompanying press release, two minority views, a list of panel members, transmittal letters, and the charge to the group are available on the AAU website here.
The National Science (NSF) today made public its biennial compendium of information and statistics about science and engineering, “Science and Engineering Indicators, 2010.”

As with previous editions, the 2010 Indicators includes a wide variety of material about the state of the U.S. research and development enterprise, including graphs and reports that chart trends in overall U.S. research and development performance, the scientific and engineering workforce, and international publications and patents, as well as comparisons of Americans’ views of scientific challenges compared to others around the world.

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