February 19, 2010

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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

Congress was out of session this week for the Presidents Day recess. Both chambers will return on Monday, February 22.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) has scheduled a cloture vote on his slimmed-down jobs bill on Monday. Provisions of the bill include an exemption from Social Security taxes for businesses that hire workers who have been unemployed for 60 days, funding for infrastructure bonds, an extension of a depreciation allowance for small businesses, and a one-year extension of surface transportation legislation. Later in the week, the Senate is scheduled to consider a bill to extend several expiring temporary provisions, such as unemployment insurance and health care benefits for the long-time unemployed.

House Democratic leaders are uncertain about next week’s schedule, reports CongressDaily, beyond setting aside time on February 25 for the President’s health summit. It is not clear if House leaders will reschedule a vote to repeal the antitrust exemption for health insurance companies. The original vote was postponed when a blizzard closed down the federal government. CongressDaily says that repeal of the exemption was to be the first of several elements of the House-passed health care bill that Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said would be considered separately. The House also might vote next week on the intelligence authorization bill.

Regarding President Obama’s healthcare summit scheduled for next Thursday, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said yesterday that the President would make public before the summit a single health care plan with the "best ideas" from the House-passed bill and the measure approved by two Senate committees.

OTHER
On February 17, the one-year anniversary of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), ScienceWorksForUS released a report highlighting how ARRA-funded research is benefiting institutions, local communities, and the nation. A companion piece provides statements by university presidents, chancellors, and senior research officers from across the country on how Recovery Act funding is aiding their campuses and communities.

The $787-billion ARRA included $21.5 billion for scientific research and development, the purchase of scientific equipment, and science-related construction projects.

The anniversary report by ScienceWorksForUS—a joint project of AAU, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and The Science Coalition—highlights nearly 100 examples of research on diseases, energy, climate, science education, and many other areas that not only may lead to important discoveries but also are sustaining or creating jobs and strengthening the foundation for future economic growth. The report builds on the group’s website, which shows Recovery Act-supported research at colleges and universities in all 50 states. The website identifies more than 500 projects and links to over 160 university websites, including all AAU institutions.

The statements from university leaders describe research projects that have been made possible by ARRA funding; jobs that have been saved or created with the funding; the purchase or restoration of vital research equipment and other infrastructure; and the resulting impact on their communities.

AAU JOINS SUPREME COURT BRIEF SUPPORTING PAYROLL TAX EXCEPTION FOR MEDICAL RESIDENTS’ STIPENDS  NEW

AAU has joined three other higher education associations in submitting an amicus brief that urges the U.S. Supreme Court to consider a case on whether medical residents’ stipends should be subject to payroll taxes.

The amicus brief was led by the Association of American Medical Colleges and signed by AAU, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. The brief supports an appeal by the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research and the University of Minnesota of a June 2009 U.S. Court of Appeals ruling that medical residents of both institutions must pay Social Security taxes on their financial stipends.

The brief argues that medical residents are students, not employees.

“Contrary to the IRS’s longstanding position,” the groups said, “residents are not simply engaging in on-the-job training for long-term employers. Rather, as virtually every court to have considered the issue has held, residents’ long hours are spent on rigorous educational activities sponsored by their universities or teaching hospitals.”
They also wrote that “subjecting these students to additional taxes meant for nonstudent employees—with the concomitant taxes that the sponsoring institutions must pay—may reduce incentives for institutions to sponsor this critical training, at a time when the nation needs to be increasing the number of physicians it trains.”

**COLLEGE BOARD REPORTS ON FINANCIAL AID FOR MIDDLE-INCOME STUDENTS, OFFERS MARCH 2 WEBINAR ON STUDENT AID TRENDS**

Among its many reports on trends in college pricing and student aid, the College Board has issued a report that discusses financial aid options for middle-income students, including federal, state, and institutional grant aid and changes in federal education tax policy.

The organization also is offering a webinar on trends in college pricing and student aid on Tuesday, March 2, at 2:00 p.m. EST. Those interested in participating in the webinar are asked to contact Fiona Yung at fyung@collegeboard.org.

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