February 26, 2010

CONTENTS
CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
University of Arizona Official Testifies on Research Infrastructure for AAU and APLU
GAO Releases Report on University Endowments
EXECUTIVE BRANCH
Commerce Secretary Convenes Stakeholders Meeting on Commercialization of Academic Research
Associations Endorse Administration Plan to Expand Income-Based Student Loan Payment Program  NEW
OTHER
ACS to Hold Capitol Hill Briefing March 4 on Greenhouse Gas Monitoring  NEW
Deadline for U.S. Professor of the Year Applications is April 16  NEW

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The House today approved an intelligence authorization bill (H.R. 2701). The Senate also met today, with no roll call votes.

The Senate will return to session on Monday, March 1, when it is scheduled to consider a package (H.R. 4213) of long-term extensions of tax benefits and programs, including unemployment insurance and COBRA health benefits, which are set to expire Sunday. Senator Jim Bunning (R-KY) has held up approval of a 30-day extension of the expiring provisions, arguing that the package should be offset by unspent Recovery Act money. The Senate might also consider an FAA reauthorization next week.

The House next week may take up the $15-billion jobs bill approved February 24 by the Senate, which includes payroll tax breaks for hiring the unemployed, bond-financing for state and local infrastructure projects, and extension of surface transportation programs. The Senate-passed measure is far smaller than the $154-billion jobs bill (H.R. 2847) that the House passed in December.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA OFFICIAL TESTIFIES ON RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AAU AND APLU

A subcommittee of the House Science and Technology Committee heard testimony February 23 on the state of research infrastructure at the nation’s universities. Dr. Leslie Tolbert, Vice President for Research, Graduate Studies, and Economic Development at the University of Arizona, spoke on behalf of her university, AAU, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU).

The hearing was convened by the House Subcommittee on Research and Science Education as part of the full Committee’s preparation for reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act. Among the panelists were Albert Horvath, Senior Vice President for Finance and Business at The Pennsylvania State University, who spoke on behalf of his university and the Council on Governmental Relations, and Thom Dunning, Director of the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Dr. Tolbert said in her written statement that dwindling state and private funding is eroding the ability of the nation’s universities to provide the physical infrastructure needed to keep researchers working at full capacity. It is “absolutely essential” for the federal government to make strategic investments in research infrastructure, she said, if the nation is to maintain its global leadership in science.

Among the recommendations in Dr. Tolbert’s testimony:

- the National Science Foundation (NSF) should increase the percentage of its budget devoted to infrastructure from the current 24 percent to 27 percent by FY16, as recommended by the National Science Board in 2003;
- Congress should authorize and fund NSF’s Academic Research Infrastructure program; and
- the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) should convene an interagency working group to assess the pressures that impede universities from adequately supporting critical physical infrastructure needs and recommend steps by the federal government to ensure adequate support for the nation’s academic research infrastructure.

Additional information about the hearing, including the testimony of the panelists, is available on the Committee’s website here.

GAO RELEASES REPORT ON UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENTS

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) on February 23 issued its long-awaited report on college and university endowments as mandated by the Higher Education Opportunity Act. The report includes a factual explanation of endowments as well as case studies of 10 representative nonprofit higher education institutions. GAO made no recommendations for action.

The report describes available data on the size and change in value of endowments over the past 20 years, the extent to which endowments funds are restricted at the selected institutions, and the policies and practices of those colleges and universities in distributing endowment funds.
Among GAO’s findings: the vast majority of universities have endowments of under $100 million; the value of endowment funds has risen by an average of 6.2 percent a year in inflation-adjusted dollars since 1989; and most endowment funds are restricted for specific purposes, including student financial aid. GAO noted in its report that because industry-wide data were not available on endowment restrictions and distributions, the agency selected 10 institutions for case studies.

The report, “College and University Endowments Have Shown Long-Term Growth, While Size, Restrictions, and Distributions Vary,” is available on the GAO website, along with its companion highlights document.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

COMMERCE SECRETARY CONVENEES STAKEHOLDERS MEETING ON COMMERCIALIZATION OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke on February 24 convened a forum on the commercialization of academic research with a variety of stakeholders in the university, government, and business sectors. AAU President Robert Berdahl was among the more than 50 leaders who attended.

Staff members of AAU and APLU had worked with Department of Commerce staff to ensure that the meeting reflected a balanced perspective on university technology transfer and the broader role that research universities play in long-term job creation and economic development.

Participants in the meeting focused on three specific areas:

- developing more effective mechanisms to move ideas from the laboratory into the marketplace and to cross the so-called “valley of death,”
- strategies to support university technology commercialization, and
- the role of universities in fostering regional economic development.

In his opening remarks, Secretary Locke said, “With rising competition from Europe and Asia, it has never been more important for America to reap the harvest of the research we sow. Every stakeholder—from government to universities to business—has areas where we can do better. And I'm eager to learn of your ideas for how we can do that.”

AAU and APLU will continue to work closely with the Department of Commerce and OSTP—which played a significant role in today’s event—as they continue to address this set of complex issues.

ASSOCIATIONS ENDORSE ADMINISTRATION PLAN TO EXPAND INCOME-BASED STUDENT LOAN PAYMENT PROGRAM

A group of 32 higher education associations, including AAU, wrote to Vice President Joe Biden on February 24 expressing support for the Obama Administration’s proposal to expand the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) program for student borrowers. The proposal is part of the
President’s FY11 budget. The letter also expresses support for changes in tax law to ensure that student loan debt forgiveness is not taxed as income.

The IBR program was created in part to make it easier for low- and middle-income student borrowers to take lower-paying public service jobs after graduation by reducing their debt burden. Student loan payments under current IBR law are based on 15 percent of student borrowers’ disposable incomes, with cancellation of any remaining debt after 25 years. The Administration’s plan would cap borrower payments at 10 percent of net income and forgive any remaining debt after 20 years.

OTHER

ACS TO HOLD CAPITOL HILL BRIEFING MARCH 4 ON GREENHOUSE GAS MONITORING NEW

Members of the CFR are invited to attend a Capitol Hill briefing on March 4 sponsored by the American Chemical Society titled, “Greenhouse Gas Monitoring: Observational Needs for Policy Goals.” The luncheon session will run 12:00-1:30 p.m. in Room 202/203 Capitol Hill Visitors Center, Senate Side.

Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) will make opening remarks. Jane Leggett of the Congressional Research Service will then moderate the discussion, which will include Dennis Tirpak of the World Resources Institute, William Irving of the Environmental Protection Agency, and Riley Duren of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

As countries pledge to limit their greenhouse gas emissions, reliable means of monitoring GHG sources and sinks globally are needed to verify international claims and to evaluate the effectiveness of policy actions. This is not a simple matter, as forests, oceans, farms, power plants, and other factors affect the flux of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This briefing will look at current assets and future needs for assessing greenhouse gas emissions to evaluate policy tools and reduction claims.

Those interested in attending the briefing are asked to RSVP to: http://tinyurl.com/GHGMonitoring.

DEADLINE FOR U.S. PROFESSORS OF THE YEAR APPLICATIONS IS APRIL 16 NEW

The Council for Advancement and Support of Education and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching are soliciting nominations for the 2010 U.S. Professors of the Year awards. The deadline for entries is April 16, 2010.

The annual competition, held since 1981, honors a select group of U.S. professors who excel as educators and mentors for undergraduate students. In 2009, there were 42 winners—four honored at the national level and 38 recognized in 36 states, the District of Columbia, and Guam.
National winners are selected by type of institution: two-year community colleges; baccalaureate colleges; master’s universities and colleges; and doctoral and research universities.

The four national winners receive a monetary award and an expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. to speak at the November awards luncheon and to be recognized at a congressional reception.

Nomination materials and information are available on the U.S. Professors of the Year program website.

End of document