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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate will return from its spring recess on Monday, April 12. The chamber will resume consideration of the Continuing Extension Act (H.R. 4851), legislation to provide short-term extensions of health and assistance benefits for the unemployed, flood insurance, and higher Medicare payments for physicians, all which expired on March 31. Senators were unable to approve the bill before the recess because of partisan differences over whether to offset the cost of the program extensions.

The House will return on Tuesday, April 13, but at this writing, no legislative program has been announced.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

AAU AND CRS PROVIDE SUMMARIES OF EDUCATION PROVISIONS IN FY10 RECONCILIATION ACT  NEW

Summaries and analyses of the education provisions in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-152) are now available from AAU and the Congressional Research Service (CRS).

The AAU paper provides a short summary and analysis of the student aid provisions of particular interest to AAU universities. The CRS report describes and provides a history of the education-related provisions in the bill, and discusses how selected provisions amend the Higher Education Act and other laws.
AAU and the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) submitted comments today to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) on the agency’s proposal to add a question about deemed export control licenses to its Form I-129. This document is filled out by U.S. employers who wish to hire foreign workers temporarily, including universities that wish to bring foreign scholars and researchers to the U.S. under H-1B visas.

The AAU-COGR comment letter questions both the timing of the proposal—given that the Administration is now reviewing deemed export control policies—and the reasons why USCIS seeks to collect such information when it has no regulatory authority over export controls. The letter also notes that most university research is not subject to export control measures.

“The proposal also overlooks the fact that most research conducted by foreign nationals at our member institutions is fundamental research, which is excluded from export control requirements,” the two associations wrote. “Because of the fundamental research exclusion, there would likely be very few instances where deemed export control licenses would be required for foreign nationals employed at our universities on H-1Bs.”

“However, to ensure our compliance with this new requirement,” they added, “we would have to do significant additional review for I-129 submissions to confirm that this was indeed the case, an exercise that would be above and beyond what we already do to ensure compliance with the existing Department of Commerce deemed export rules.”

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the National Economic Council (NEC) are soliciting ideas from the public on how to increase the economic impact of the federal investment in university R&D and of the “innovations being fostered in federal and private proof of concept centers (POCCs).”

The request for information (RFI) focuses on two questions: how best to encourage commercialization of university research and whether POCCs can be a means of stimulating the commercialization of early-stage technologies by bridging the “valley of death” between new technologies and product development.

The RFI is viewed as part of an ongoing effort by the Administration to enhance the commercialization of new technologies and ideas generated from university-based research. It builds upon earlier efforts, such as Commerce Secretary Gary Locke’s forum held February 24th, “Catalyzing University Research for a Stronger Economy.”
Individual institutions are encouraged to respond to this request for information as soon as possible with ideas and suggestions from faculty and administrators on their own campuses. Comments should be submitted by Monday, April 26.

AAU and other higher education associations will develop a joint response to the RFI, but their suggestions will be intended to complement, not replace, the insights and on-the-ground recommendations from universities around the country.

TREASURY SEEKS COMMENTS ON REQUIRING VOLUNTEER SERVICE FOR EDUCATION TAX CREDITS   NEW

The Treasury Department is soliciting public comments on the feasibility of requiring college students to perform community service in order to receive Lifetime Learning and American Opportunity federal tax credits for tuition and related expenses.

According to a notice published in the March 30, 2010 Federal Register, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5) directs the Departments of the Treasury and Education to explore the pros and cons of such a requirement and report back to Congress on the study. Written comments from the public must be received before April 29, 2010.

Among the questions of particular interest to the Treasury Department are whether such a requirement should be implemented, and, if so, whether institutions of higher education should be tasked with administering it. If colleges and universities should handle such a program, the notice asks, what would be the major operational and administrative challenges and how would institutions ensure student eligibility and that “meaningful” community service opportunities are available for all students?

AAU and other higher education associations will develop a joint response to the notice.

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