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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House met in pro forma session today, with no legislative business; the Senate did not meet.

When the Senate reconvenes on Monday, April 19, the chamber will begin consideration of executive nominations. The House next week is expected to consider legislation to give the District of Columbia a voting representative in the House.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

TWENTY-FIVE GOVERNORS SUPPORT PRESIDENT’S FY11 BUDGET REQUEST FOR NIH

A bipartisan group of 25 governors sent a letter to leaders of the House and Senate budget committees on April 13 asking them to craft an FY11 budget resolution that accommodates President Obama’s $32.2 billion FY11 budget request for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The request is $1 billion, or 3.2 percent, more than the comparable FY10 funding.

The governors’ letter notes that along with NIH’s significant contribution to Americans’ health and well-being, the agency is an important economic engine. “NIH funding directly supports 350,000 jobs across the U.S.” and is “an instrumental part of the success of the U.S. life sciences industry and its 6 million high wage U.S. jobs,” they wrote.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
INNOVATION TASK FORCE URGES CONGRESS TO REAUTHORIZE AMERICA COMPETES ACT

The Task Force on American Innovation, in which AAU participates, wrote to leaders of the House and Senate science committees on April 7 expressing support for reauthorizing the America COMPETES Act (P.L. 110-69) this year. The three-year authorization expires at the end of 2010.

Said the letter, “Reauthorizing COMPETES will underline our nation’s commitment to policies that strengthen America’s talent pool and provide continued support for long-term basic science, ensuring that American innovators will continue to produce the discoveries that create new technologies, new industries, and high value jobs for Americans.” The organizations added that their member companies and allied organizations “stand ready to work with you to move this legislation forward.”

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVES NSF REAUTHORIZATION BILL

A subcommittee of the House Science and Technology Committee on April 14 approved a reauthorization bill for the National Science Foundation (NSF) that would authorize $47.5 billion for the agency over five years. The measure, reported out by the Research and Science Education Subcommittee, is expected to be marked up by the full committee in the next two weeks. It is one of three bills that the full committee will fold into its reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act, which expires at the end of 2010.

The NSF Reauthorization Act of 2010 includes several overarching themes: increasing Foundation support for high-risk, high-reward research; fostering research partnerships between academia and industry; and broadening opportunities for women and underrepresented groups in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.

The reauthorization bill directs NSF to use at least five percent of its research budget to fund basic high-risk, high-reward research, and it encourages increased support for manufacturing research. The measure also seeks to foster innovative research by expanding partnerships between academic institutions—research universities, minority-serving institutions, undergraduate institutions, and community colleges—and the private sector.

Other notable provisions include: sense-of-Congress language that encourages NSF to devote 24-to-27 percent of its budget to research infrastructure; a provision that directs the National Science Board to conduct a study and report back to Congress on mid-scale research instrumentation; and creation of a pilot program to award cash prizes for innovative research.

The bill also contains several notable STEM education provisions, including authorization for postdoctoral fellowships in STEM education research and a reduction from 50 percent to 30 percent in the institutional cost-sharing requirement in the Robert Noyce Fellowship Program. The bill also would require that at least 50 percent of NSF funding for the Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeships program and the Graduate Research Fellowships (GRF) program come from the Research and Related Activities Directorate. Currently, the NSF Education and Human Resources Directorate provides most of the funding for the GRF program.
AAU, APLU EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT PROPOSED DOE EMERGENCY DATA COLLECTION FOR ARRA FUNDING

AAU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) submitted comments to the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Office of Management and Budget on April 12 that raise concerns about DOE’s proposal to initiate emergency data collection for funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The associations, responding to four DOE Federal Register notices issued in late March and early April, questioned the rationale for additional DOE data collection efforts and said that applying such new reporting requirements to university ARRA grant recipients was unnecessary “in light of the superior performance record of universities under ARRA.” Any needed improvements in reporting, they said, should focus on improved reporting by those failing to properly use or report their use of DOE funds, rather than on remedial efforts that include institutions that already are meeting their obligations.

AAU and APLU also associated themselves with a more detailed comment letter submitted to DOE on April 9 by the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR).

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