CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate met today to continue debate on the financial regulatory reform bill (S. 3217), with no votes. The House did not meet.

Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, May 3. The Senate will continue floor debate on the financial regulatory bill, with the possibility that consideration of amendments could take the debate into the second week of May.

The House next week is expected to vote on a $6 billion program to provide rebates of up to $3,000 per household for energy-efficient improvements (H.R. 5019).

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

HOUSE S&T COMMITTEE APPROVES AMERICA COMPETES ACT REAUTHORIZATION   NEW

The House Science and Technology Committee on April 28 approved a comprehensive, five-year reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act (H.R. 5116). The bipartisan vote was 29 to 8.

The measure reauthorizes programs and funding levels for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science, and the National Institute of
Standards and Technology (NIST). The final committee-approved measure reduces the authorization levels for the three agencies by 10 percent from the bill introduced last week by Chairman Bart Gordon (D-TN). The modification, made as part of a manager’s amendment, authorizes doubling the agencies’ budgets over 10 years, rather than the seven years authorized in 2007 by the original America COMPETES Act.

“This funding trajectory is not as steep as the bill enacted in 2007 and it is not as shallow as the president’s budget request,” said Chairman Gordon in a press release. “These levels are lower than I would like them, but I believe they are practical considering our current budget deficits. At a time of flat discretionary budgets, a seven percent annual growth rate allows for continued progress in getting our research programs back on a path to be the best in the world.”

SCHOLARLY ROUNDTABLE RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDED IN COMPETES ACT REAUTHORIZATION

The America COMPETES Act reauthorization bill approved by the House S&T Committee includes provisions to require the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to coordinate federal policy on public access to the results of federally funded unclassified research. The language was contained in the manager’s amendment.

The requirements in the bill reflect a number of recommendations made earlier this year by the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable, a group of experts convened last June by the House S&T Committee, in conjunction with OSTP, to examine the state of scholarly publishing and make recommendations for expanding public access to scholarly journal articles.

Specifically, Section 123 of H.R. 5116 directs the OSTP director to establish an interagency public access committee to coordinate development of uniform standards for research data, navigation tools, and other applications to achieve interoperability across federal science agencies and between research data and scholarly publications. The group would consult with non-federal stakeholders, such as representatives from universities, libraries, and publishers, as well as with international science and technology counterparts.

NINETY-TWO UNIVERSITIES AND SYSTEMS URGE APPROVAL OF AMERICA COMPETES ACT

A group of 92 universities and university systems sent a letter to leaders of the House Science and Technology Committee on April 26 urging them to act on a bipartisan reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act as quickly as possible. (Three institutions joined the letter after it was discussed in the April 26 CFR Update.)

“The bipartisan America COMPETES Act enacted in 2007 has played and continues to play a crucial role in outlining our nation’s path forward in the global economy by fostering innovation and keeping the United States competitive,” said the letter. “As universities from across the country, we recognize the fiscal challenges facing the nation, and believe the funding of research and STEM education are investments that the country must continue.”
AAU, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the American Council on Education sent a similar letter to the committee leaders on April 23.

**COMPETE AMERICA ISSUES STATEMENT ON SENATE DEMOCRATS’ IMMIGRATION REFORM PROPOSAL**

Compete America, a coalition in which AAU participates, issued a statement on April 29 thanking a group of Senate Democrats for introducing a conceptual proposal for comprehensive immigration reform.

The coalition, which consists of corporations, educators, research institutions, and associations concerned about legal, employment-based immigration, applauded a provision to make green cards available immediately to foreign students who graduate from U.S. institutions with advanced science and technology degrees. However, the group also expressed concern that other provisions could make it more difficult for employers to use H-1B and L-1 temporary visas.

“Compete America will continue to advocate for ways to improve the current immigration reform framework, and we remain fully committed to the process,” said the statement.

**EXECUTIVE BRANCH**

**ASSOCIATIONS COMMENT ON PROPOSAL TO REQUIRE PUBLIC SERVICE FOR EDUCATION TAX BENEFITS**

A group of 21 higher education associations, including AAU, submitted comments to the Department of the Treasury on April 29 expressing “serious reservations” about the agency’s proposal to mandate community service as a condition for receiving federal higher education tax credits.

“We believe that combining these two individually worthy policy objectives would yield a result that is decidedly less than the sum of its parts,” said the associations. Their letter said that such a requirement would be detrimental to students, particularly low-income and non-traditional students; would be difficult and costly to administer; and would “inadvertently harm the thriving community service and service-learning efforts already occurring on campuses across the higher education community.”

“The culture of community service that thrives on campuses across the country is something about which the higher education community is deeply proud and strongly committed to enhancing,” added the letter. It noted that 6.7 million college students participated in community service through volunteer activities in 2008, and that institutional members of Campus Compact alone offered more than 24,000 service-learning courses in academic year 2007-2008.
The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), AAU, and the Association of State and Land-grant Universities (APLU) have published a report based on a workshop about the risks of biological research in colleges and universities.

“Competing Responsibilities?: Addressing the Security Risks of Biological Research in Academia,” incorporates findings and recommendations from a January, 2010 workshop held with policymakers and leaders of the university, scientific, and security communities. The group discussed challenges that academic institutions face in dealing with national security requirements. It also suggested ways to improve the collaborative environment for biological research and education while minimizing potential national security risks.

AAAS, AAU PUBLISH FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND HANDBOOK ON PROMOTING CAMPUS DIVERSITY

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and AAU have released a first-of-its-kind handbook on how to promote campus diversity—particularly in scientific fields—without running afoul of current law. The report is aimed at helping college and university leaders increase the gender and racial diversity of their faculties and student bodies in “what often seems an overly complicated, barrier-laden and hostile legal environment.”

The media advisory for an April 28 teleconference about the report is available here. The handbook, “Navigating a Complex Landscape to Foster Greater Faculty and Student Diversity in Higher Education,” can be downloaded free of charge from the AAAS website here.

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