CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

Congress was out of session this week for the July 4 recess. The Senate will return to session on Monday, July 12, the House on Tuesday, July 13.

When Congress returns, Senate Democrats are expected to try again to approve an extension of unemployment benefits, which fell one vote short of the 60 needed for passage on June 30. CQToday reports that Democratic leaders could get their 60th vote after the governor of West Virginia appoints a short-term successor to Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV), who passed away on June 28. The House approved the benefits extension bill on July 1.

Other items on the Senate’s agenda for this month, CQToday reports, are finishing the overhaul of financial regulations, approving the FY10 wartime supplemental funding bill (H.R. 4899), and confirming Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan.

House leaders have not announced next week’s floor schedule, at this writing.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

EXECUTIVE ORDER AIMS TO IMPROVE FEDERAL BIOSECURITY COORDINATION AND OVERSIGHT  NEW

The President last week issued an executive order to overhaul the way the United States safeguards biological select agents and toxins. The order requires federal agencies to consolidate and to better coordinate and oversee federal programs that govern safety of select agents and toxins. This includes developing tiers in the existing list based on risk, providing more specificity on physical security requirements, coordinating inspections, and creating a new advisory panel of federal security and scientific experts to advise the Select Agent Program.
The executive order is based largely on the report of the Working Group on Strengthening the Biosecurity of the United States, a multi-agency task force. The changes are intended to enable academic researchers to work with pathogens both safely and more easily.

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