CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

Congress is out of session and will meet again for legislative business on Monday, November 15, for the lame-duck session.

The House adjourned on September 30. The Senate finished its legislative business on September 29, but it has reconvened every few days in pro forma session to keep President Obama from making recess appointments during the period before the lame-duck session.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

REPUBLICAN PLEDGES TO CUT SPENDING COULD SLASH RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FUNDING NEW

The Republicans’ overwhelming election victories this week could have a significant impact on university research and education in the new Congress. Particularly in the House, where Republicans will take control, there will be dozens of new Members, as well as new committee and subcommittee chairs. Presumptive House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) has said he expects House committees to have greater policy authority than they have had under previous Democratic and Republican leadership, and Republican leaders have made clear that they plan to step up oversight of the Executive Branch.

Regardless of the election outcome, it has been clear for some time that public concern about government spending and the deficit would place new pressure on domestic discretionary spending. In fact, earlier this year, the White House Office of Management and Budget directed non-security federal agencies to prepare for a five percent cut in their budgets in FY12, based on the FY12 estimates they made in their FY11 budgets. But Republicans are calling for much larger cuts.
As Republican leaders stated in their “Pledge to America,” released in September, “With common-sense exceptions for seniors, veterans, and our troops, we will roll back government spending to pre-stimulus, pre-bailout levels, saving us at least $100 billion in the first year alone and putting us on a path to begin paying down the debt, balancing the budget, and ending the spending spree in Washington that threatens our children’s future.” (See page 21 of the document.) Rep. Boehner said in a September 8 press statement that this pledge means rolling back domestic discretionary spending to FY08 levels. (See the following article for an analysis of how such cuts would affect federal R&D investments.)

The focus on cutting spending will make it difficult for Democratic leaders to increase funding for research and higher education in the FY11 appropriations package, which Congress will take up in the lame-duck session that begins November 15. The focus on cutbacks also could add impetus for the President to cut spending further in his FY12 budget.

**AAAS ANALYZES IMPACT OF REPUBLICAN BUDGET PROPOSAL ON FEDERAL RESEARCH INVESTMENT**  

An analysis by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) shows that rolling back non-defense R&D spending to FY08 levels, as recommended in the House Republicans’ proposal, would cut that funding by $8 billion, or 12.3 percent, from the President’s FY11 request. (The President’s FY11 request does not incorporate funding increases provided in FY09 and FY10 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which were one-time expenditures.)

The impact on individual agencies in FY11 would be even greater. The AAAS analysis shows that a return to FY08 funding levels would cut National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding by more than nine percent from the President’s FY11 request, a cut of about $2.9 billion and a loss of about 4,100 research grants. For the National Science Foundation, the cut would be more than $1 billion from the FY11 request, a 19 percent cut, which would translate to 2,300 fewer research grants. And the Department of Energy Office of Science would lose $663 million, a cut of nearly 15 percent.

**PRESIDENT SAYS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT SHOULD NOT BE CUT BACK**

At a press conference on November 3 following Tuesday’s election, President Obama discussed the importance of continuing to invest in the future, even as we look for ways to reduce federal spending. “I want to make sure that we’re not cutting into education that is going to help define whether or not we can compete around the world,” he said. “I don’t think we should be cutting back on research and development, because if we can develop new technologies in areas like clean energy, that could make all the difference in terms of job creation here at home.” (His remarks are in answer to a question from Chip Reid.)

Referencing investments in infrastructure, he cited the recent announcement that China now has the fastest supercomputer in the world, adding, “They’re making investments because they know those investments will pay off over the long term.”
The President said that in discussions on the budget, “the key is to be able to distinguish between stuff that isn’t adding to our growth, isn’t an investment in our future, and those things that are absolutely necessary for us to be able to increase job growth in the future as well.”

On tax issues, the President said it makes sense to extend provisions that help sustain and advance the recovery, such as the research and development tax credit. He also said he would be pleased to work with House Republican leaders to address congressional earmarks.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

INNOVATION TASK FORCE URGES SENATORS TO PASS AMERICA COMPETES ACT NEW

Under the auspices of two organizations, the Task Force on American Innovation and Tapping America’s Potential, a group of 250 organizations wrote to Senate leaders today urging them to pass the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act in time to work with the House to make it possible for the President to sign the reauthorization bill into law before the current act expires at the end of this Congress.

The group of industry, academic, and professional organizations—including AAU—noted that the original America COMPETES Act was enacted in 2007, with bipartisan support, as a response to concerns raised by the National Academies’ report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm.” The legislation addressed the nation’s need to sustain its economic and technological competitiveness with added investments in basic research and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education.

“We recognize the dire challenges facing the nation and the difficult choices on federal spending that policymakers must make,” said the letter. “Continued strong funding of basic research and STEM education programs will help ensure the economic growth needed to restore long-term fiscal strength and national prosperity.”

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