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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

Congress convened on Wednesday, January 5, for the first session of the 112th Congress. In contrast to the 111th Congress, Republicans now control the House, with a margin of 242 to 193, while Democrats have held onto the Senate, but with a slimmer margin of 53 to 47.

The Senate met on January 5 and is in recess until Tuesday, January 25. In the interim, Senate Democrats are developing a plan to change the rules for filibusters on which their caucus can agree. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), new ranking member on the Senate Rules Committee, told National Journal Daily, however, that Senate Republicans are unlikely to support any rules changes, other than the proposal to eliminate secret holds on legislation and nominations.

The House met today and approved, by a largely party-line vote of 236-181, the rule for consideration next week of legislation to repeal the health care overhaul (H.R. 2).

The House will reconvene next Tuesday, January 11, to consider H.R. 2, as well as a House resolution (H. Res. 9) instructing specific House committees to develop alternative health care reform legislation.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
NEW RULES WILL CHANGE HOUSE BUDGET PROCESS  NEW

The rules package adopted by the House on January 5 would make a number of changes affecting budgeting and appropriations. Specifically, the rules will allow Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) to determine enforceable spending limits for the remainder of FY11. Federal operations have been running at largely FY10 levels under a continuing resolution, which expires on March 4. A new “cut-as-you-go” rule requires any increases in mandatory spending to be offset by equal cuts in mandatory spending elsewhere. Spending increases may not be paid for by tax increases, and tax cuts do not need to be paid for.

As noted by the Washington Post, the new House rules will have no impact in the Senate, which remains under Democratic control. “But their adoption marks the first move in what is expected to be an extended battle between Republicans and the White House over fiscal policy,” said the publication.

An analysis of the pros and cons of the new House rules in terms of deficit reduction is available from The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

HOUSE REPUBLICANS LOOK TO SIGNIFICANTLY CUT FY11 DISCRETIONARY SPENDING  NEW

House Republican leaders are working to fulfill a campaign promise they made last year to return non-security discretionary spending to its FY08 levels. They said at the time that defense, homeland security, and veterans programs would be exempt from such cuts. They estimated that the savings would be $100 billion in FY11, based on the President’s proposed FY11 budget of $1.13 billion.

In the meantime, however, Congress was unable to approve full-year funding for FY11 last year, and the federal government has been running since October 1 at largely FY10 levels through a continuing resolution (CR) that expires on March 4. Thus, federal spending in FY11 has been well below the President’s FY11 budget request and by the time the CR expires, there will be a little less than seven months remaining in the fiscal year.

Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) has said the target for FY11 savings is now about $60 billion in FY11, reports CQ Today. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) said during a press conference on January 4 that defense spending might be included in cost-cutting efforts, reports National Journal Daily. He said, “I think most of us have said everything is going to be on the table. And we’re going to be about setting priorities.”

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ANNOUNCES REPUBLICAN SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRS, MEMBERS    NEW

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY) today announced the chairs and Republican members of the 12 appropriations subcommittees for the 112th Congress. He also announced that Reps. Jerry Lewis (R-CA), and Bill Young (R-FL) will be given the title of “chairman emeritus” of the committee.
Democratic Ranking Member Norm Dicks (D-WA) has not announced subcommittee ranking member, nor has the Senate Appropriations Committee announced its makeup and membership.

The House Appropriations Committee subcommittee chairs are:

Agriculture Subcommittee: Jack Kingston (R-GA)

Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee: Frank Wolf (R-VA)

Defense Subcommittee: Bill Young (R-FL)

Energy and Water Subcommittee: Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ)

Financial Services Subcommittee: Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO)

Homeland Security Subcommittee: Robert Aderholt (R-AL)

Interior Subcommittee: Mike Simpson (R-ID)

Labor, Health and Human Services Subcommittee: Dennis Rehberg (R-MT)

Legislative Branch Subcommittee: Ander Crenshaw (R-FL)

Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee: John Culberson (R-TX)

State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee: Kay Granger (R-TX)

Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Subcommittee: Tom Latham (R-IA)

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

PRESIDENT SIGNS AMERICA COMPETES ACT

President Obama on January 4 signed into law the America COMPETES Act (H.R. 5116), a reauthorization bill that has been strongly supported by the higher education and business communities.

As reported previously, the measure was approved by the Senate on December 17 by unanimous consent and by the House on December 21 on a vote of 229 to 130. On the day the bill passed the House, Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN), then-chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, released a statement supporting the measure, while Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX), now chairman of the renamed House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, issued a statement explaining why he opposed the bill, based on concerns over new programs and the process by which the bill had been considered during the lame duck session. Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) issued a joint statement on January 5 in support of the bill.

The final legislation is a slimmed-down version of the bill passed by the House in May, authorizing $45.2 billion for several science, technology, and education agencies and programs
over three years, rather than the $85.6 billion over five years in the earlier House-approved bill. The bill reaffirms the 10-year budget doubling track of the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and includes specific authorization for the DOE Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E).

The new law also contains language in the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) section that creates an interagency public access committee to coordinate federal policies on expanding public access to the results of federally supported research. The provision incorporates key recommendations made by the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable, an expert panel of librarians, library scientists, publishers, and university academic leaders, for which AAU has provided leadership.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

NRC RELEASES REPORT ON BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES TRAINING   NEW

The National Research Council (NRC) has released a prepublication copy of its report, Research Training in the Biomedical, Behavioral, and Clinical Research Sciences, which attempts to model future needs for training in the biomedical sciences. The NRC Board on Higher Education and Workforce has updated the report periodically since it was mandated to do so by creation of the National Research Service Award (NRSA) program at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1973.

When the committee developing this latest edition of the report began its work in 2008, members recognized the current and upcoming fiscal restraints on the NIH budget. Accordingly, they separated their recommendations between those that would be costly, but high priority, and those that they believed could be accomplished without additional federal funding. Among the costly, but high priority recommendations is raising the indirect cost rate on NRSA and K awards from the current eight-percent cap to the full indirect cost rate on research grants.

NATIONAL ACADEMIES RELEASES FINAL GUIDE FOR USE AND CARE OF LABORATORY ANIMALS

The National Academies has released the final version of the updated Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, which serves as the basis for the Public Health Service (PHS) animal research policy, as well as for institutional accreditation by the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC).

The purpose of the update, the first since 1996, was “to reflect new scientific information related to the issues already covered in the Guide, and to add discussion and guidance on new topics of laboratory animal care and use related to contemporary animal research programs.”

New requirements in the latest version of the Guide include group housing of all social species, intra-operative monitoring of animals undergoing surgical procedures, and a greater emphasis on recordkeeping. There also is additional information about aquatic species, protocol review, and occupational safety and health programs.
A prepublication of the Guide was released in June, and the final version reflects some additional language changes, many of which appear to be minor wordsmithing. AAALAC is developing detailed guidance and FAQs before integrating the new Guide into the accreditation process. It is not clear when and how the PHS Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare will incorporate changes in the new Guide into its regulations, but it seems likely that agency officials will coordinate with AAALAC’s process. AAALAC anticipates issuing the new accreditation guidance sometime in February.

OTHER

AUTM’S 2010 “BETTER WORLD REPORT” HIGHLIGHTS SOCIETAL BENEFITS OF RESEARCH

The 2010 edition of the “Better World Report,” published by the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM), provides new examples of products and companies that have arisen from research conducted by the nation’s universities, hospitals, and national laboratories.

This latest compilation of academic technology transfer success stories highlights the 30th anniversary of the Bayh-Dole Act, which allowed universities and nonprofit organizations to obtain patents on inventions that had been federally funded, thus sparking a major expansion in technology transfer. Along with a foreword by former Senator Birch Bayh (D-IN), co-author of the Bayh-Dole Act, the publication presents 30 examples of innovations developed from academic research, one for each year of the Bayh-Dole Act.

AAU POSTS EXPLANATORY DOCUMENTS ON UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND DOCTORAL EDUCATION

AAU has posted on its website five short documents aimed at providing basic information on federal funding of university research and doctoral education. Additional documents will be added to the website as they are developed, including a piece on the economic impact of research universities.

The documents are posted together under “AAU Reports” and separately under their respective issue areas. They are:

Understanding Doctoral Education in the U.S.
University Research: Understanding its Role
University Research: The Role of Federal Funding
Understanding Peer Review of Scientific Research
Understanding University Technology Transfer

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