CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House and Senate met in pro forma session today. The House will return to session on Tuesday, May 31, but no legislative program has been announced. The Senate will effectively be in recess next week, although the chamber will remain in pro forma session, with no votes, to prevent the President from making any recess appointments. When the Senate resumes work on Monday, June 6, it will consider the nomination of Donald Verrilli, Jr. as Solicitor General.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE MEMBERS URGE MAINTAINING PELL GRANT MAXIMUM AWARD LEVEL IN FY12

A group of 105 Democratic Representatives sent a letter to leaders of the House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee on May 19 urging them to maintain the Pell Grant maximum award at the current level of $5,550.

The letter, initiated by Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA), describes Pell Grants as “the cornerstone of our nation’s student aid program, currently enabling more than nine million students to get the higher education and job training they and our nation need.” The Member letter notes that with 80 percent of the fastest growing jobs in the country demanding training above the high school level, the nation needs more students graduating with college degrees to remain competitive. “Pell Grants are essential to America’s future.”

TWENTY-FOUR HOUSE DEMOCRATS URGE RESTORATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FUNDING
Under the leadership of Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ), 24 House Democrats sent a letter to appropriations leaders on May 18 asking them to provide $126 million for Title VI International Education and Foreign Language programs in FY12, the same as their funding in FY10. The budget for the programs was cut by $50 million, or 40 percent, in the final FY11 continuing resolution.

“The various programs funded under this account serve to strengthen the nation’s educational infrastructure in areas where the need grows greater by the day,” said the letter. “Strong academic programs in critical foreign languages and intensive training in multi-disciplinary regional studies, including socio-economic, cultural, security, and religious aspects among others, are vital to national security.”

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

CONGRESS APPROVES FOUR-MONTH SBIR/STTR EXTENSION  UPDATED

Congress late yesterday gave final approval to a four-month extension of the Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs, preventing their authorizations from expiring on May 31. The small business authorizations were paired with an extension of three Patriot Act provisions which were set to expire last night at midnight. The Senate vote on the package was 72 to 23; the House vote was 250 to 153. President Obama has already signed the measure.

Last week, the Senate passed a one year extension of the small business research programs (S. 990), having been unable to pass a long-term reauthorization bill. (The bill does not include the Senate’s increase in the SBIR/STTR set-aside in the major research agencies that AAU opposes.) The House took up S. 990 on May 24, amended the measure to last through September 30 rather than a year, and then approved it by voice vote. When the shortened extension was sent back to the Senate, however, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) used the bill as a vehicle for a procedural maneuver that allowed the Senate to debate the Patriot Act measure. The Patriot Act extension had been filibustered by Senator Rand Paul (R-KY).

Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), chair of the Senate Small Business Committee and lead sponsor of S. 990, opposed the shorter SBIR/STTR extension, but the packaging of the SBIR/STTR extension with the Patriot Act forced acceptance of the September 30 expiration date.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

AAU, COGR, AAMC URGE DELAYED IMPLEMENTATION OF LATEST LAB ANIMAL CARE GUIDE

AAU, the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR), and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) wrote to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on May 24 urging officials to delay implementation of the updated guide for laboratory animal care. They requested the delay to provide time for the agency to address outstanding issues and to phase in new animal care requirements through institutional implementation plans.

The associations were responding to an NIH request for comments on adoption and implementation of the eighth edition of the “Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals”
(the Guide). The Guide, which is a publication of the National Academies’ Institute for Laboratory Animal Research, serves as the basis for compliance and assurance with the Public Health Service policy on the humane care and use of laboratory animals. Institutional assurance of laboratory animal care programs is based on the 1996 version of the Guide; NIH has proposed adopting the updated edition, released last June, and using it as the basis for evaluation starting March 31, 2012.

The associations expressed concern that the updated Guide contains additional requirements in housing and environmental standards that not only represent a troubling move away from performance-based standards toward more rigid engineering standards, but also would require significant new financial investment for many institutions. They urge NIH to “proceed with caution” in implementing the new Guide, given “the research community’s view and the determination of NIH’s own expert panel that a change in the 1996 Guide was not necessary.”

**NSF RESTORES POLICY ON TEACHING ACTIVITIES OF GRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWS NEW**

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has reinstated its previous policy on teaching and related activities of NSF graduate research fellows while the agency reviews this and other policies in the Graduate Research Fellowship program. Earlier, the Foundation had modified its policy to stipulate that research fellows could not conduct teaching activities during their three-year fellowships. NSF reversed the policy in response to concerns raised by the academic and scientific communities.

The reinstated policy allows graduate research fellows to participate in teaching and similar activities that are in furtherance of their own educational objectives. The policy that will be in effect during the 2011-2012 fellowship year is an updated version of the one described in the 2009 Guide (NSF 09-62), which is as follows:

“Each Fellow is expected to devote full time to advanced scientific study or work during tenure. However, because it is generally accepted that teaching or similar activity constitutes a valuable part of the education and training of many graduate students, a Fellow may undertake a reasonable amount of such activities, without NSF approval. It is expected that furtherance of the Fellow's educational objectives and the gain of substantive teaching or other experience, not service to the institution as such, will govern these activities. Compensation for such activities is permitted based on the affiliated institution’s policies and the general employment policies outlined in this document.”

The NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program Office released a letter explaining the change in policy, as well as a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document. Additional information, including the updated 2011 policy guide, is available on the NSF [website](#).