July 15, 2011

CONTENTS

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE NEW

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

Still No Budget Deal in Sight NEW

House Approves FY12 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill NEW

House Bill Would Level-Fund NSF, Cut NASA Funding in FY12 UPDATED

AAAS-Led Letter Urges Support for All Disciplines in FY12 NSF Funding Bill

Committee Sustains Subcommittee Cuts in NEH FY12 Budget UPDATED

OTHER

AAU Publishes Third Edition of the “AAU Scientific Enquirer”

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE NEW

The Senate did not meet today. The House met to complete consideration of the FY12 Energy and Water appropriations bill (H.R. 2354). (See story below.)

When the Senate reconvenes on Monday, July 18, it will resume consideration of the House-passed FY12 Veterans-Military Construction appropriations bill (H.R. 2055).

The House also reconvenes on Monday, July 18, when it will hold suspension votes. Beginning on Tuesday, the House will consider the Cut, Cap, Balance Act, which is a conservative Republican proposal to cut and cap federal spending and to pass a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution (see next item below). At this writing, there is no text for the bill. Also next week, the House is scheduled to consider a Federal Aviation Administration extension and the FY12 Legislative Branch appropriations bill.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

STILL NO BUDGET DEAL IN SIGHT NEW

The President and congressional leaders continued meeting this week in an effort to work out a deal to address the deficit and raise the nation’s debt ceiling before the August 2 deadline set by the Treasury Department. But the sides remain far apart.

Earlier this week, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) offered a back-up proposal during the White House talks that would allow the President to raise the debt ceiling in three stages over the next year or so, if his action was accompanied by his submission of a package of spending cuts. National Journal Daily reports that under this plan, each request to raise the limit
would be subject to a congressional resolution of disapproval. But since a resolution of disapproval would require a two-thirds vote in each chamber to override a potential presidential veto, the plan would largely assure that the President could raise the debt ceiling, even if a majority of Members voted against it.

Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) is working with Senator McConnell to tie in with the proposal about $1.5 trillion in spending cuts over 10 years that were identified by the bipartisan budget group convened by Vice President Joe Biden. The plan may include creation of one or more special panels to develop proposals for tax and entitlement changes that, like the military base closure commission, Congress could adopt or reject but not amend.

Conservative Republicans have lashed out against Senator McConnell’s plan and focused attention on the House vote next week, noted above, on the conservative-backed Cut, Cap, Balance Act, which would cap spending and make raising the debt ceiling contingent on Congress approving and sending to the States for ratification a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. Politico reports that Democrats oppose the amendment to the Constitution in part because it would require a super majority to raise any taxes.

Even so, reports National Journal Daily, if Senators McConnell and Reid can reach a deal that the White House can support and the Senate can pass, it would “create enormous political pressure on the House” to support the package.

**HOUSE APPROVES FY12 ENERGY AND WATER APPROPRIATIONS BILL**  **NEW**

The House today approved its FY12 Energy and Water appropriations bill (H.R. 2354) on a largely partisan vote of 219 to 196. Only 10 Democrats voted in favor of the bill.

Among the amendments adopted during floor consideration was one offered by Reps. Adam Schiff (D-CA), Charles Bass (R-NH), and Marcia Fudge (D-OH) to move $79.6 million from the Department of Energy (DOE) departmental administration account into the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E). The amendment essentially restored ARPA-E to its FY11 funding level of $180 million, since the underlying bill provided just $100 million for the agency. The Schiff-Bass-Fudge amendment was approved on July 14 by a vote of 214 to 213. Although ARPA-E advocates were concerned that House leaders might call for a revote on the amendment, that did not happen.

In addition, the House defeated an amendment by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) to completely defund ARPA-E. The chamber also defeated an amendment by Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) that would have raised funding for the DOE Office of Science by $42 million to its FY11 level.

As discussed in detail in the June 17 edition of the AAU Weekly Wrap-up, the FY12 Energy and Water funding bill reported from the House Appropriations Committee would fund the DOE Office of Science at $4.8 billion, a cut of $42 million from its FY11 level.

**HOUSE BILL WOULD LEVEL-FUND NSF, CUT NASA FUNDING IN FY12**  **UPDATED**

The House Appropriations Committee approved its FY12 Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) funding bill on July 13 by voice vote, endorsing subcommittee decisions to level-fund the National Science Foundation (NSF) at $6.9 billion and cut the NASA budget by $1.6 billion
from its FY11 level. While the Committee passed an amendment by Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA) to cut $48 million across the bill to bolster operations for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the bill still essentially funds NSF at $6.9 billion and NASA at $16.8 billion for FY12. In addition, the Committee approved no amendments to eliminate funding for specific merit-reviewed research grants or specific disciplines (see next item below).

Within the NSF budget, the bill gives priority to research by adding $43 million to the Research and Related Activities Directorate (R&RA), paid for by cutting $26 million from Education and Human Resources (EHR) and $17 million from Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction. This means R&RA would receive $5.6 billion, EHR $835 million, and Equipment and Facilities $100 million.

In the accompanying report, the Committee suggests that the R&RA Directorate maximize the money available in FY12 for new programs and activities by terminating some of the proposals in the President’s FY12 budget request. The Committee also directs NSF to give priority in FY12 to research in such fields as cybersecurity; cyberinfrastructure improvements; advanced manufacturing; materials research; and interdisciplinary research in the natural and physical sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

For NASA, the Committee-passed bill provides $16.8 billion, or $1.6 billion below FY11 funding. Within NASA, the bill appropriates $4.5 billion for Science, which is $431 million below the current level. As part of that reduction in Science, the Committee recommends reducing funding for Earth Science by $100 million from the President’s FY12 request of $1.7 billion. But the Committee report stresses the importance of protecting high-priority missions such as Ice, Cloud, and Land Elevation Satellite-2; the Soil Moisture Active-Passive mission; and missions with near-term readiness dates.

Although the bill would terminate funding for the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), CJS Subcommittee Chairman Frank Wolf (R-VA) and Subcommittee Ranking Member Chaka Fattah (D-PA) said during the markup they would talk further about funding JWST in FY12.

The Committee-passed bill also provides $569 million for Aeronautics, which is an increase of $1 million; $375 million for Space Technology; $3.6 billion for Exploration; $138 million for Education; and $3 billion for Cross-Agency Support programs. Additionally, the bill appropriates $10 million to restart production of Plutonium-238 for deep space missions, and it calls for the transfer of $1 million from Cross-Agency Support to NASA’s Office of Inspector General for the commission of an independent assessment of NASA’s strategic direction and agency management. As in FY11, the bill prohibits the Office of Science and Technology Policy and NASA from engaging in bilateral activities with China, unless authorized by Congress.

AAAS-LED LETTER URGES SUPPORT FOR ALL DISCIPLINES IN FY12 NSF FUNDING BILL

A group of 143 organizations and universities, including AAU and a number of AAU member institutions, sent a letter to House appropriators on July 11 urging that as they consider the FY12 CJS funding bill they support merit-reviewed research in all disciplines funded by NSF. The letter, led by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), specifically urges appropriators to oppose legislative efforts to defund already-awarded, peer-reviewed research grants that might have funny-sounding titles, or to eliminate or substantially reduce funding for specific areas of science such as work funded through NSF’s Science, Behavioral, and Economic (SBE) Science Directorate. The letter adds:
“We recognize the challenge that our nation faces in addressing the deficit and revitalizing our national economy; however, defunding specific grants or eliminating entire sets of disciplines, such as those represented by the SBE program, sets a dangerous precedent that, in the end, will inhibit scientific progress and our international competitiveness. Congress must exercise its oversight responsibilities, but second-guessing the scientific process could have a chilling effect on scientists and young people considering a future in science.”

More support for the SBE directorate came last week from New York Times columnist David Brooks, who expressed strong opposition in his July 8 column to any measure that would eliminate funding for social and behavioral research at NSF. SBE research has been under particular attack by some Members of Congress. Brooks writes that by studying the way actual behavior differs from the way we assume people behave, researchers are coming up with “scores of real-world applications.” In the middle of this “golden age of behavioral research,” he says, we should not balance the budget “by cutting cheap things that produce enormous future benefits.” To do so, he adds, would be “like cutting off navigation financing just as Christopher Columbus hit the shoreline of the New World.”

**COMMITTEE SUSTAINS SUBCOMMITTEE CUTS IN NEH FY12 BUDGET**

The House Appropriations Committee approved its FY12 Interior-Environment funding bill on July 13, making no changes from subcommittee in funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The measure would fund NEH at $135 million, a cut of $20 million from the Endowment’s FY11 enacted level of $154.7 million. The funding also is about $11 million less than the President’s FY12 request. This near-13 percent cut in NEH funding is disproportionate relative to the overall reduction in the FY12 Interior-Environment appropriations bill, which is seven percent below the FY11 level (and 12 percent below the President’s FY12 request).

Especially hard hit in the NEH budget are the competitive grants funded through the NEH Core Programs, which would be cut by $14.5 million, or nearly 20 percent, from the FY11 level. The Core Programs include Research, Education, Preservation & Access, Digital Humanities, Public Programs, and Challenge Grants. Within the Core Programs, the Research account took the biggest hit, with a $4 million cut, bringing it down to $12.3 million. The Committee increased funding for the "We the People" program to $4.75 million, an increase of $1.5 million. “We the People” is an initiative introduced under the last administration that was zeroed out in the President's FY12 budget request. The bill also provides $2 million for the agency's new "Bridging Cultures" initiative.

Report language accompanying the bill expresses support for "We the People," "Bridging Cultures," and the NEH/NSF "Documenting Endangered Languages" program (page 108). It also praises the work of the state humanities councils.

**OTHER**

**AAU PUBLISHES THIRD EDITION OF THE “AAU SCIENTIFIC ENQUIRER”**
AAU has been working to counter ridicule of “funny-sounding science,” including social and behavioral research, through the AAU Scientific Enquirer. The third issue, published July 13, contains articles on a project that runs shrimp on a treadmill in the lab to better understand how they respond to environmental stresses in coastal waters; how studying which toys baby boys and girls prefer may lead to better understanding of how disruptions in hormone levels affect behavioral disorders, such as autism; and on why developing robots that can fold towels is an important step toward enabling robots to perform very complex tasks.

End of document