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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House met in pro forma session today and will reconvene in regular session on Monday, October 24. The chamber next week is expected to consider a bill (H.R. 674) to repeal a provision that requires government agencies to withhold three percent of payments to contractors of greater than $10,000 as a means of ensuring they pay their full tax obligations.

The Senate did not meet today and will be out of session next week. When the chamber returns to regular session on Monday, October 31, it is expected to continue consideration of the three-bill FY12 appropriations “minibus” (H.R. 2112), which it spent much of this week considering.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE TO RESUME WORK ON FY12 “MINIBUS” ON OCTOBER 31  UPDATED

The Senate worked late into the night on amendments to the three-bill minibus (H.R. 2112), but did not finish work before adjourning for recess. However, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) was able to secure a cloture motion on the bill, Politico reports, so he will be able to control debate more tightly when the Senate resumes work on H.R. 2112 the week of October 31. Congressional leaders hope that approval of such smaller packages of FY12 appropriations bills will allow Congress to avoid using an omnibus FY12 appropriations package to enact all 12 funding bills.
Senator Reid had hoped to finish work on the minibus this week, but the delay in its completion has prompted House lawmakers to consider adding a second continuing resolution (CR) to H.R. 2112 when it goes over to the House, reports CQ Today. That would provide more time to finish the remaining FY12 appropriations bills beyond the November 18 expiration of the current CR.

The three bills in the appropriations package are Agriculture (H.R. 2112), Transportation-Housing (S. 1596), and Commerce-Justice-Science (S. 1572), the last of which includes funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and NASA.

Senator Dianne Feinstein (D–CA) chair of the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, told CQ Today earlier this week that if the Senate is able to pass the first minibus, her bill (H.R. 2354) is likely to be among the bills included in the next one.

The Senate so far has approved only the FY12 Military Construction-Veterans appropriations bill. However, the Appropriations Committee has reported out 11 of the FY12 bills, with only the Interior and Related Agencies bill still to be considered.

AAU SENDS FY12 CONFERENCE LETTERS ON FIVE AGENCIES  UPDATED

AAU sent letters to House and Senate appropriators this week requesting specific FY12 funding levels for research and education programs in the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Energy (DOE), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as higher education and student aid programs in the Department of Education (DOEd).

The letters for Defense, Energy, NIH, and student aid were sent jointly with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

AAU FY12 BRIEFING PAPER PINLINES VALUE OF DOE GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

AAU has released a briefing paper that describes the DOE Office of Science Graduate Fellowship Program, including its value to the Department’s future scientific workforce and the importance of funding the program at $7.5 million in FY12. This increase of $2.5 million over the FY11 level is needed both to sustain current awards and to conduct a competition for a new class of fellows. The Senate bill would provide the additional funding; the House bill would not. Without the increased funding, the Office of Science would be unable to fund a new class of fellows, placing the future of the program in jeopardy.

The briefing paper is intended to provide information to Members of Congress and their staff as decisions are made about final FY12 DOE program funding.

COALITION ASKS APPROPRIATORS TO SUSTAIN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Coalition for International Education, a group in which AAU participates, wrote to House and Senate appropriators on October 18 asking them to fund the Department of Education’s Title VI international education programs at the Senate’s higher spending level in a final FY12 spending bill.
The Senate bill would allocate $75.7 million for the programs, the same as the FY11 level. The House bill would level fund Title VI domestic programs but eliminate funding for the Fulbright-Hays overseas programs and Title VI-C, the Institute for Public Policy program.

HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS SEND SEPARATE VIEWS TO DEFICIT PANEL

Democratic and Republican members of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee have submitted separate views on deficit reduction to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction.

Committee Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) sent a letter to the deficit panel on October 13 urging the committee generally to consider “the critically important role that federal investments in science, technology, and STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] education play in keeping the United States a global economic and technological leader, reducing our debt over the long term, creating new industries and jobs, and providing practical benefits to all of our citizens.” She asked the Committee to take a “balanced approach” to deficit reduction and to include revenue enhancements as a means to protect R&D investments.

A group of 10 committee Republicans, including Committee Chair Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), took a more detailed, agency-by-agency approach in the letter they sent the deficit panel on October 14. The group provided specific recommendations on research priorities at several science agencies, including NSF, NASA, and the Department of Energy (DOE).

Among other recommendations, the group says that funding for NSF should not fall below its current level of $6.86 billion, and that its members strongly support the role of NSF in STEM education. For NASA, the letter offers recommendations about specific portions of the space agency’s portfolio, including a reduction of $177 million from specific Space Science programs and projects.

On Department of Energy funding, the Science Committee Republicans write that the DOE Office of Science “should be the top funding priority among DOE R&D programs and be protected from cuts by the Joint Committee,” while also questioning spending trends in some Office of Science programs and in such programs as the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy and the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy program.

SIXTY HOUSE DEMOCRATS URGE DEFICIT PANEL TO PROTECT FEDERAL S&T AND EDUCATION INVESTMENTS

A group of 60 House Democrats sent a letter to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction on October 14 urging the panel to “protect, prioritize and strengthen federal investments in education, basic scientific research, and technological development” as it develops its deficit-reduction plan.

The letter, led by Reps. Rush Holt (D-NJ) and David Price (D-NC), said:

“Our investments in education, research, and development—including funding for basic science and biomedical research at universities and federal labs and wise incentives for
private sector research—have put our economy on the cutting edge of the world’s most advanced industries. These investments are a powerful way to spur job growth and are a must for a country that seeks to be competitive in the 21st Century economy.”

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

NIH SOLICITS COMMUNITY ADVICE ON HOW TO CUT SPENDING

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has begun reaching out to the biomedical research community for advice on how it should manage its research portfolio during an era of reduced budgets. Every type of cost-savings seems to be on the table, from limiting numbers of grants per investigator to capping salaries charged to grants.

NIH has developed a web-based tool to help users visualize cost savings from various budget-cutting strategies. Additional information about the request is provided here by Sally Rockey, NIH Deputy Director for Extramural Research.

OTHER

ASSOCIATIONS LAUNCH HIGHER EDUCATION ATTAINMENT COMMISSION

Under the leadership of the American Council on Education (ACE), the six presidents of the higher education associations, including AAU, have established a new Commission on Higher Education Attainment. As described in a press release, the commission’s goal “is to chart a course for greatly improving college retention and attainment and, in turn, restore the nation’s higher education preeminence.”

The 19-member panel will be chaired by E. Gordon Gee, president of The Ohio State University, with three members selected by each of the six associations. The AAU representatives on the commission are Michael Drake, chancellor of the University of California, Irvine; Morton Schapiro, president of Northwestern University; and Holden Thorp, chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The first meeting of the commission will be October 31 in Washington, D.C. The group plans to complete its work by fall 2012.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESIDENT MARY SUE COLEMAN ELECTED CHAIR OF AAU

The presidents and chancellors of AAU have elected Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan, as chair of the association. Her one-year term began on October 18, the final day of AAU’s semi-annual meeting in Washington, D.C. Scott S. Cowen, president of Tulane University, was elected vice chair.

Dr. Coleman, who served during the past year as vice chair of AAU, succeeds Jared L. Cohen, president of Carnegie Mellon University. As AAU chair, she will lead the Executive Committee, the association’s governing board, and serve as a spokesperson for the association, particularly on issues of special concern to research universities.
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