CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The second session of the 112th Congress began on Tuesday, January 3. Both the House and Senate will hold periodic pro forma sessions—with no business conducted—until each returns for legislative business: the House on January 17 and the Senate on January 23.

Congress in the next several weeks must decide whether and how to continue beyond the end of February the payroll tax holiday, unemployment benefits, and the “doc” fix that prevents a significant cut in Medicare payments to physicians, all of which were extended for two months in late December. Also on the tax agenda are extensions of several popular provisions that expired on December 31, including the R&D tax credit, the above-the-line tuition tax deduction, and the IRA charitable rollover.

At the same time, the Administration is engaged in final preparations for the President’s FY13 budget, which is expected to be released in early February.

Over the next two months, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) plans to address not only the full-year extension of the payroll holiday package, reports Politico, but also extension of the Federal Aviation Administration authorization, House Speaker John Boehner’s (R-OH) highway and energy bills, and legislation aimed at prohibiting Members of Congress from profiting from insider trading on stocks while they serve in elective office.

When the Senate reconvenes for legislative business on Monday, January 23, the chamber will consider a judicial appointment, with a vote late that afternoon. On Tuesday, January 24, the Senate is scheduled to hold a cloture vote on consideration of the Protect IP Act (S. 968), aimed at curtailing online piracy of copyrighted content.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH
AAU President Hunter Rawlings sent a letter to National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Francis Collins today offering suggestions for managing NIH resources during the current era of fiscal constraint.

The letter was developed in response to a request Dr. Collins made of the AAU presidents and chancellors when he spoke at their October 2011 membership meeting. It says AAU strongly supports the principle that funding decisions made by NIH should be based primarily on the best peer-reviewed science. It also notes that NIH data show that no single cost-cutting measure—such as limiting the number of awards per investigator or capping investigator salaries—would be sufficient to “address the potential funding restraints that NIH might unfortunately be faced with in the near future.”

AAU’s letter recommends that NIH and its institutes and centers consider five general principles as they address the “ongoing funding crisis.” These are, in brief:

- Protect the basic research component of the research portfolio;
- Recognize the extraordinary fiscal constraints faced by extramural partners, such as universities, as cost-cutting decisions are made;
- Ensure that the entire NIH research portfolio—intramural and extramural—is subject to rigorous merit review;
- Balance the investments in investigator-initiated basic research with the unique opportunities in translational and clinical science; and
- Ensure that strategic funding decisions are evidence-based.

COMMERCE DEPARTMENT RELEASES COMPETITIVENESS REPORT

The Department of Commerce (DOC), in consultation with the National Economic Council, today released a report entitled, “The Competitiveness and Innovative Capacity of the United States.”

A number of recommendations included in the report closely mirror AAU’s response to the DOC’s April 2010 Request for Information on the Administration’s Strategy for American Innovation. Among the recommendations that reflect longstanding AAU positions are increased support for proof-of-concept and early-stage funding for research commercialization, extension of the research and development tax credit, and the promotion of universities as critical partners in regional innovation clusters.

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