CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The House and Senate have continued to 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. Both chambers held brief pro forma sessions today.

As discussed previously, 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, Politico reports, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) plans to address not only the full-year extension of the payroll holiday package 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 submitted comments to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) on January 12 in response to its Request for Information (RFI) regarding public access to peer-reviewed scholarly publications resulting from federally funded research.

The AAU comments have drawn heavily from the recommendations of the Scholarly Publishing Roundtable, which the association has endorsed. The comments argue for expanding public access to the results of federally funded research in ways that accommodate the needs and interest of the diverse stakeholders within the scholarly publishing community. They add that sustainable open-access publishing is a desirable end-point, where feasible, and that public-private partnerships are a promising way to expand access to scientific information by interconnecting governmental and non-governmental databases.

OSTP launched a broad public access forum in 2009, and conducted a comment period as part of that forum, to which AAU responded in January, 2010. The America COMPETES Reauthorization Act, enacted in December, 2010, created an Interagency Public Access Committee (Sec. 103., P.L. 111-358) and called for additional consultation with scholarly publishing stakeholders.

**NATIONAL SCIENCE BOARD RELEASES REPORT ON NSF MERIT REVIEW**

The National Science Board on January 10 released a report on the merit review process at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the federal agency that the Board oversees. The Board found that the NSF merit review criteria remain appropriate for evaluating proposals for NSF funding, but recommended that the agency better define the two criteria of intellectual merit and broader impacts.

**NIH REQUESTS INFORMATION ON BIOMEDICAL WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) on January 10 issued two Requests for Information (RFIs) on diversity in the biomedical research workforce and on the management of research and administrative data.

The diversity RFI was issued by the Advisory Committee to the NIH Director Working Group on Diversity in the Biomedical Research Workforce, which is seeking advice on actions NIH can take to increase the diversity of the biomedical research workforce. Among the issues the working group has identified are the transition points in the biomedical research workforce pipeline where NIH programs might most effectively encourage diversity—such as entry into graduate programs and entry into post-doctoral positions—and factors that influence the grant review process, such as the role of institutional affiliation and academic pedigree. Responses to the diversity RFI are due by February 24, 2012.
The data management RFI was issued by the Advisory Committee to the NIH Director Working Group on Data and Informatics, which is seeking advice on policies regarding “the management, integration, and analysis of research data and administrative data.” Among the issues the working group has identified are challenges in data collection, standards development, data accessibility, incentives for data sharing, and support for tool development, maintenance, and support. Responses to the data management RFI are due by March 12, 2012.

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