CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House is in pro forma session today, with no legislative business. The chamber will reconvene on Tuesday, May 15, and during the week will consider the National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4310) and the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (H.R. 4970).

The Senate is out of session today and will reconvene on Monday, May 11, at which time the chamber will take up a cloture motion to consider the Export-Import Bank Reauthorization (H.R. 2072).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE REJECTS ONE HARMFUL AMENDMENT ON NSF RESEARCH, ACCEPTS TWO OTHERS  UPDATED

Following two days of debate and consideration of more than 60 amendments, the House on May 10 approved its version of the FY13 Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) appropriations bill (H.R. 5326). During consideration of the bill, the chamber rejected an amendment to reduce National Science Foundation (NSF) funding by $1.2 billion, but the House approved two others that would de-fund political science research and climate change education programs at the science agency. The vote on final passage was 247 to 163.

AAU issued a press release praising the FY13 appropriations process so far for generally protecting investments in scientific research, but issued a separate statement criticizing House approval of the amendment to eliminate political science research funding at NSF.
The climate change amendment, offered by Rep. Chip Cravaack (R-MN), would prohibit the use of NSF funds for the agency’s Climate Change Education program. The amendment was approved by a vote of 238 to 188. (Roll Call #241).

--Amendment Defunding Political Science Programs at NSF

Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) offered an amendment late on May 9 to eliminate funding for political science programs at NSF, without reducing the agency’s overall funding. The political science programs receive about $11 million. The House approved the amendment by a vote of 218 to 208 (Roll Call #243).

During floor consideration, CJS Subcommittee Ranking Member Chaka Fattah (D-PA) said:

“It is important that we understand the political dynamics, radicalization of populations around the world, how political parties operate in the former Soviet Union, all of the other issues that are being studied. I can see that you could probably bring a list of studies in front of the Congress from the National Science Foundation and get a laugh on any day. But these studies are important. They're merit based. They're decided on merit only…Now, there's some advantage, I guess, politically to appear to be anti-intellectual, to have some desire to know little or less about what's going on in the world about us. But it is not worthy of a great Nation.”

--Amendment Cutting NSF by $1.2 Billion from the House FY13 Level

Earlier on May 8, the House defeated another amendment by Rep. Flake that would have cut funding contained in the bill for NSF by $1.2 billion, which Mr. Flake said would bring funding back to the agency’s FY08 level. The vote against the Flake amendment was 121 to 291 (Roll Call #217). All Democrats and 112 Republicans voted against the amendment.

During the debate, CJS Subcommittee Chair Frank Wolf (R-VA) and Rep. Fattah spoke out against the amendment. Rep. Wolf said:

“This amendment challenges broad, long-standing, bipartisan agreement on the needs to prioritize Federal investments in basic research, math and science and physics and chemistry and biology in order that America can be number one. This agreement is based on a strong and unambiguous link between investments in research and development and growth and employment and productivity and GDP. This link has been documented repeatedly by expert researchers, economists, and analysts working in administrations and congressional majorities in both parties, as well as private and nonprofit entities.

The link is also well-known and understood internationally, where major foreign competitors, including the European Union, China, and South Korea are investing strongly, are investing much higher, at a much higher level than we are, at a much higher level than we are in research, in the hopes of producing or attracting high-value economic activity. We have already lost a good deal of competitive advantage that we previously held over those countries, and if we fail to keep pace with them in research and development, our situation will only worsen.
Unfortunately, this amendment would contribute to precisely that scenario by not only eliminating any potential growth in NSF basic research next year, but actually reducing basic research expenditures by nearly $1 billion. As a father of five kids, my wife and I, we have 16 grandkids. I want the 21st century to be the American century and not the Chinese century.”

Rep. Fattah said:

“This is the premiere science research agency in the world. It is not the only one. We are not shadowboxing with ourselves. We have a country of 309 million people. Singapore, which is a country of 4.8, less than 5 million people, probably less people than in the Phoenix area alone, invests some $7 billion in their National Science Foundation. They're stealing talent from us today, hired away some of our top cancer researchers and other scientists, right? We have China, a much larger country. It's built over the last 5 years 100 science-only universities. The nation that leads in innovation and science will lead the world economically and militarily.”

HOUSE APPROVES FY13 RECONCILIATION PACKAGE  UPDATED

The House on May 10 approved a two-part legislative package (H.R. 5652) to prevent sequestration – the automatic 10-year discretionary spending cuts required by last year’s Budget Control Act (BCA). The vote was 218 to 199, with no Democrats voting for the measure.

The first part of the package, a budget reconciliation bill, would put in place more than $310 billion in savings over 10 years to substitute for the BCA’s automatic cuts in defense and domestic discretionary spending. The savings would be taken from Medicare, food stamps, social services, and other non-defense mandatory spending and entitlement programs. None would be taken from defense programs. (The six committees that developed the spending cuts were charged with saving $261 billion over 10 years, but recommended the cuts of more than $310 billion.)

The second part of the legislative package, the Sequester Replacement Act (which was H.R. 4966), would block the 2013 portion of the BCA’s automatic cuts, otherwise slated to begin on January 2, 2013. About $90 billion of the $300+ billion savings in the reconciliation bill would effectively replace the 2013 sequester cuts. The total 2013 sequester is actually $109 billion, but House Republicans used their FY13 budget resolution to cut $19 billion from the FY13 discretionary spending level set by the BCA; that lower spending level is being used in the House appropriations process. (The House FY13 budget resolution achieves the $19 billion in discretionary spending cuts disproportionately, increasing defense discretionary spending by $8 billion, and cutting non-defense discretionary spending by about $27 billion.)

The Senate is unlikely to take up a reconciliation measure this year, and the White House has issued a veto threat if the House version were to reach the President’s desk. The House reconciliation package may serve as a basis on which House Republicans can engage in the expected post-election budget negotiations.
STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATE BILL REMAINS ON HOLD IN SENATE

UPDATED

Legislation to postpone the scheduled July 1 doubling of the interest rate on Stafford student loans remains on hold in the Senate, as an impasse continues between Democrats and Republicans over how to cover the $6 billion cost of the one-year extension.

Senate Democrats had put forward a bill (S. 2343) that would pay for the postponement by eliminating a tax break for certain corporations. Senate Republicans favor the strategy in the House-passed bill (H.R. 4628), which would cover the cost by eliminating funding for a preventative health fund created by the Accountable Care Act.

In floor consideration on May 8, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) held a cloture vote on the Democratic bill, but the measure failed to secure the 60 votes needed to avoid a Republican filibuster. The vote was 52 to 45. Senator Reid had planned to hold a second cloture vote on the bill later in the week, reports CQ.com, but decided to table the measure because of the continuing inability to find a compromise acceptable to both sides.

ASSOCIATIONS URGE RENEWAL OF EDUCATION-RELATED TAX PROVISIONS

In testimony submitted for the record to the House Ways and Means Committee’s Select Revenue Measures Subcommittee, a group of 14 higher education associations, including AAU, expressed strong support for renewing several expired and expiring higher-education-related tax provisions.

The testimony, submitted for an April 26 hearing, requests extension of the American Opportunity Tax Credit; the above-the-line deduction for qualified tuition and related expenses; Employer-provided Educational Assistance (Sec. 127) benefits; the expanded Student Loan Interest Deduction (SLID); and the expanded Coverdell Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). The group also expressed strong support for extending the Individual Retirement Account (IRA) Charitable Rollover.

After describing the value of each provision, the testimony concludes, “All of these tax provisions enhance access to higher education through direct support to students or their families and indirectly by helping generate charitable donations to college and universities that are frequently used to support institutional student financial aid.”

End of document