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CONTENTS

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
Senate Committee Bill Would Increase FY13 Funding for NIH and Pell Grants  UPDATED
--Report Language Seeks to Protect Javits Fellowships  NEW
Senate Bill Would Fund Study of Higher Education Regulatory Burden  NEW
Coalitions Urge Senators to Support NSF Funding and Oppose Amendments

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
AAU, APLU Urge Congressional Leaders to Protect University-Agency Interactions

OTHER
National Academies Panel Issues Report on Research Universities  NEW
NIH Panels Issue Reports on Biomedical Workforce, Diversity  NEW
Associations Provide Background Material on Teacher Preparation Issues

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House has been out of session this week. The chamber will reconvene on Monday, June 18, but no legislative program has been announced.

The Senate did not meet today. When the chamber reconvenes on Monday, June 18, it will continue consideration of the farm bill (S. 3240).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE PANEL CONTINUES WORK ON FY13 APPROPRIATIONS BILLS  NEW


With the House out of session, the chamber made no progress this week on the FY13 appropriations bills. However, the House Appropriations Committee is scheduled to mark up two bills on Tuesday, June 19: Agriculture and Transportation-HUD, and reports indicate that the Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee may mark up its FY13 bill on June 20, to be followed
by full committee markup on June 29. That would leave just Financial Services and Interior-Environment pending at the subcommittee level. The House has approved five of the bills.

SENATE COMMITTEE BILL WOULD INCREASE FY13 FUNDING FOR NIH AND PELL GRANTS  UPDATED

The Senate Appropriations Committee yesterday approved its version of the FY13 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations on a party line vote of 16 to 14. The measure provides $158.8 billion in discretionary funds, an increase of $2 billion over the FY12 level. Of particular interest to research universities, the bill would increase funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by $100 million and maintain the discretionary portion of the maximum Pell Grant award at $4,860 for the 2013-2014 academic year. When combined with mandatory funding, the Pell Grant maximum would increase by $85 to $5,635.

During the markup, Senator Jerry Moran (R- KS) offered an amendment to increase NIH funding to $32 billion, offset by an across-the-board cut to all other programs. The amendment was defeated by a recorded vote of 12-18.

National Institutes of Health. For NIH, the measure "provides $30.723 billion, an increase of $100 million, to fund biomedical research at the 27 Institutes and Centers that comprise the NIH," according to a committee summary. The measure recommends $631 million for the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences, of which up to $40 million would be available for the Cures Acceleration Network (CAN). The FY12 funding level for CAN is about $10 million; the Administration requested up to $50 million for CAN in FY13.

Higher Education and Student Aid. Beyond the Pell grant program, other higher education and student aid programs, except for a handful of Title III programs, are level-funded.

The bill includes the President's proposal to reduce the payments to guarantee agencies in the Federal Family Education Loan program and limit the in-school subsidy on subsidized Stafford loans to 150 percent of normal program length. The savings would be funneled into the expected FY14 Pell shortfall. Additionally, the bill eliminates room and board as part of the cost of attendance in the Pell Grant program for distance education programs. That provision is not in the President's budget.

As amended in committee, the Senate bill would restore eligibility for federal financial aid to students without high-school diplomas or GED's who have passed an "ability to benefit" test. Congress ended aid to such students last year in the FY12 pending bill, as part of a plan to shield the Pell program from cuts.

Title VI international education domestic programs received the President's requested increase of $1.7 million.

The bill does not provide specific funds for the President's Race to the Top proposal for higher education, but the Committee notes “that the concerns the administration has raised about rising college costs are very serious ones, and agrees that action is needed to reduce burdens on families and improve outcomes for students.” The Committee “supports the [Administration’s] proposals in principle but believes they deserve more deliberation in Congress.”
The bill does provide $40 million for his First in the World initiative. The President's budget included $55 million for this competition-based program for colleges and nonprofit organizations to develop, validate, or scale up innovative and effective strategies for increasing college access and completion, particularly for minority and low-income students.

The President's proposed Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA-ED) for research and development in education at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels would be funded at $44.8 million. The bill includes a provision preventing colleges and universities from using federal funds for marketing, recruitment, and advertising, a measure that reflects the Harkin-Hagan bill introduced in April.

--Report Language Seeks to Protect Javits Fellowships  NEW

After Congress approved the FY12 Labor-HHS-Education that folded the Javits Fellowship program into the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program, higher education advocates have sought to ensure that current Javits fellowships are protected and that students in the Javits disciplines are eligible for new grant competitions.

Report language in the Senate FY13 Labor-HHS-Education bill seeks to do that. The report says that the committee has included bill language to allow GAANN funds to support continuation costs of the Javits program, and urges the Department of Education to “ensure that the arts, humanities, and social science disciplines supported by the current Javits program are eligible fields for new and continuing grant competitions…” The report language requests the Secretary of Education to provide an implementation plan for consolidation of the two programs within 30 days of enactment of the act.

SENATE BILL WOULD FUND STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION REGULATORY BURDEN  NEW

The FY13 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill includes report language that provides $1 million for the Secretary of Education to commission the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study of federal regulations and reporting requirements that affect colleges and universities. The higher education associations have strongly supported the study, which was authorized by the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008, but never funded. The report language was added to the manager’s amendment at the request of Senators Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN). The language reads in part:

“The study shall include information describing, by agency, the number of Federal regulations and reporting requirements affecting institutions of higher education, the estimated time required and costs to institutions of higher education (disaggregated by types of institutions) to comply with the regulations and reporting requirements affecting institutions of higher education, and recommendations for consolidating, streamlining, and eliminating redundant and burdensome Federal regulations and reporting requirements affecting institutions of higher education. The study shall be submitted to the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations, as well as the Committee on HELP and the Committee on Education and the Workforce not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this act.
COALITIONS URGE SENATORS TO SUPPORT NSF FUNDING AND OPPOSE AMENDMENTS

In preparation for Senate consideration of the FY13 Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) appropriations bill later this month, two groups of organizations and universities have written to Senators urging them to support strong funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and to oppose any floor amendments that would either reduce overall NSF funding or single out specific programs or projects for cuts. During House consideration of the FY13 CJS bill, the chamber rejected an amendment by Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) to cut NSF funding by $1.2 billion, but approved his amendment to prohibit NSF from funding political science research. It is expected that a similar political science amendment will be offered during Senate consideration.

A group of 121 organizations and universities, including AAU, that was put together by the Coalition for National Science Funding urged Senators to support NSF and to reject “legislative attempts to micromanage NSF and undermine the merit review process by singling out specific programs for elimination as recently occurred in the House.” The letter urges Senators “to protect the integrity of the scientific enterprise by ensuring that the NSF and its independent scientific panels determine where the best scientific opportunities are and how to absorb any potential reductions to its budget.”

In addition, under the leadership of the American Council on Education (ACE), a group of 24 higher education associations, also including AAU, expressed strong support for NSF and asked Senators to “vote against any proposals to reduce its funding or restrict NSF support for political or other sciences.”

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

AAU, APLU URGE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS TO PROTECT UNIVERSITY-AGENCY INTERACTIONS

AAU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities wrote to House and Senate leaders on June 11 expressing serious concerns about amendments added to two bills that would inadvertently place severe restrictions on the ability of government employees to attend meetings, workshops, and conferences at colleges and universities.

In response to concerns about employees at the General Services Administration spending lavishly on out-of-town meetings, restrictive amendments were added to the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (H.R. 2146) during House floor consideration and to the 21st Century Postal Service Act (S. 1789) during Senate floor consideration.

Under these provisions, meetings between federal agency officials and university faculty members and administrators would be curtailed significantly because a government agency would not be permitted to expend any funds, however small, on more than one visit per year to the same institution, such as a university. “This would be harmful to continuing projects, programs, initiatives, and discussions that require more than a single in-person meeting or conference,” said the letter. “We urge you to protect the partnership between federal
policymakers and the higher education community and maintain the ability of government employees to participate in meetings and other events organized by and held at our institutions.”

OTHER

NATIONAL ACADEMIES PANEL ISSUES REPORT ON RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

NEW

A panel of the National Research Council yesterday issued its report on research universities, “Research Universities and the Future of America: Ten Breakthrough Actions Vital to Our Nation’s Prosperity and Security.” The report essentially calls on the federal government, state governments, businesses, and universities to reaffirm and revitalize their partnership in order for research universities to continue to produce the talent, advance the knowledge, and promote the innovation that are the basis of the nation’s economic strength and security.

At an event yesterday to release the report, panel chair Chad Holliday, chairman and CEO of the DuPont Company, said research universities are more critical to the nation’s future than many people realize. “This is really a prosperity and security report,” he said, noting that it fills in details about many of the issues about continued U.S. innovation and economic competitiveness raised in its predecessor report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm.”

Mr. Holliday said that over the next 12 months the Committee on Research Universities would hold workshops around the country to discuss the 10 recommendations in the report with leaders from research universities, local and regional businesses, and state and local governments.

AAU issued a statement welcoming the NRC report. Among other elements, the AAU statement notes:

“The report emphasizes that the value of research universities is due in part to their comprehensive nature. We agree. Science and STEM fields are critical to our future, but the contribution universities make to advancing the humanities, arts, and the professions are essential as well, not only as important components of human inquiry and knowledge but in supporting the growing interdisciplinarity of research and education.”

NIH PANELS ISSUE REPORTS ON BIOMEDICAL WORKFORCE, DIVERSITY

NEW

NIH officials released two major reports on the biomedical research workforce yesterday at a meeting of the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD). The first report was produced by a working group tasked with developing a “model for a sustainable and diverse U.S. biomedical research workforce,” while the second report focused more specifically on diversity. The diversity report was prompted by a high profile study that showed racial disparities in receipt of NIH research awards.
The first report, for which only the executive summary is available, was developed by a working group chaired by Princeton University President Shirley Tilghman. (The full report, which is undergoing the federal clearance process, is expected to be available soon.)

At the presentation of the report to the ACD, President Tilghman said that the working group quickly discovered that there were too many uncertainties in the existing data to develop a robust model, so the group instead created an online data resource to compile and present available data in a more useful way. Based on that data, the working group presented three major findings:

- The combination of the large upsurge in U.S.-trained PhDs, the increased influx of foreign-trained PhDs, and the aging of the academic biomedical research workforce makes launching a traditional, independent, academic research career increasingly difficult.
- The long training time and relatively low early career salaries, compared to other scientific disciplines and professional careers, may make a biomedical research career less attractive to the best and brightest of our young people.
- Current training programs do little to prepare individuals for anything but an academic research career, despite clear evidence that a declining percentage of graduates will find such positions in the future.

In response to these findings, the working group made several recommendations. Those that would most affect research universities include:

1. Capping the number of years a graduate student can be supported by NIH funds;
2. Increasing the number of graduate students and postdocs supported by training grants or fellowships, rather than research grants;
3. Revising peer review criteria of training grants to include outcomes and training for a broader range of career outcomes;
4. Increasing stipends and benefits for postdocs and requiring individual development plans;
5. Encouraging institutions to track, collect, and publish information about career outcomes of graduate students and postdocs;
6. Calling on NIH and institutions to create stable and attractive staff scientist positions; and
7. Recommending that NIH consider reducing, over a 20 year period, the percentage of funds from NIH sources used for faculty salary support.

NIH Director Francis Collins accepted the report, saying that because implementing some of the recommendations would have a substantial impact on the research community; NIH would need to spend considerable time in deliberating whether and how to implement them.

The second report, Diversity in the Biomedical Workforce, focuses on key transition points in the biomedical research pipeline. The working group made recommendations ranging from K-12 education to peer review of NIH awards, some of which, not surprisingly, overlapped with the broader working group’s recommendations. Among the recommendations in the diversity report were establishing formal mentoring practices, providing additional fellowship opportunities for under-represented minority students, and creating a competitive grants program to establish training infrastructure at under-resourced institutions with a track record of producing and sustaining minority scientists.
ASSOCIATIONS PROVIDE BACKGROUND MATERIAL ON TEACHER PREPARATION ISSUES

In anticipation of the Department of Education issuing controversial draft regulations on teacher preparation later this summer, a task force of the higher education associations has developed a package of materials for use by the higher education community. These materials outline the community’s issues with the Department’s proposals, offer the community’s principles for evaluating teacher preparation programs, and provide a set of myths & facts on teacher preparation. The materials were developed by the associations’ Higher Education Task Force on Teacher Preparation.

As reported previously, the group charged by the Department of Education with negotiating new federal rules to govern teacher preparation programs was unable to reach consensus in April. The impasse left the Department free to offer its own preferred evaluation system in proposed draft rules. The Department’s proposal would require states to rate teacher education programs based on “value-added” scores of K-12 students taught by program graduates, job placement and job retention rates, and customer-satisfaction surveys. The rating system would be tied to eligibility for federal student aid.

While AAU agrees that the community must improve teacher preparation programs and develop more meaningful measures of program accountability proven to be reliable and valid through scientific research, it is concerned about the Department’s specific proposals. The areas of most concern to the community include the overreach by the federal government in determining teacher education program quality, the use of new criteria that have not been shown to be valid or reliable, the unprecedented move to link student aid eligibility to program quality, and the requirement that states and programs submit workforce data they do not yet have the capacity to collect.

The associations in the Higher Education Task Force will send their members an alert when the Department issues a draft regulation this summer. The alert will provide a model response to the draft regulation and encourage members to weigh in with the Department.

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