July 13, 2012

CONTENTS

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

Senate May Consider No FY13 Funding Bills before November Elections  NEW

--House Subcommittee to Mark Up FY13 Labor-HHS-Education Bill on July 18  NEW

University Leaders Urge Policymakers to Prevent Budget Sequester

Non-defense Discretionary Spending Coalition Calls for Balanced Deficit Reduction  NEW

AAU Asks Committee Leaders to Reject Excessive USDA Reporting Language  UPDATED

OTHER

New Organization Seeks to Bolster Competitive Research Funding at USDA  NEW

Associations Urge NLRB to Comply With Court Ruling on Faculty Unionization Issue

New Report Says Public Perceptions of College Affordability are Worse than Reality  NEW

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate did not meet today; the House met in pro forma session, with no votes.

When the Senate returns to session on Monday, July 16, it will consider a judicial nomination and vote on the motion to proceed to consideration of the Disclose Act (S. 3369), which would require additional financial disclosures by corporations, labor organizations, and many advocacy groups surrounding election campaigns.

The House will reconvene on Tuesday, July 17, but its schedule for next week has not yet been announced.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE MAY CONSIDER NO FY13 FUNDING BILLS BEFORE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS  NEW

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said earlier this week that the chamber might not consider any of its FY13 appropriations bills before the November elections. He cited as a barrier to consideration House Republicans’ decision to work with an FY13 discretionary spending total $19 billion below the level set by last year’s Budget Control Act. While House Appropriations Committee Chairman Harold Rogers (R-KY) responded that the funding differences should not keep the Senate from approving its own funding bills, CQ.com notes that
the two chambers are not expected to resolve their differences over the FY13 discretionary spending total before the elections. Congress will likely approve a stopgap continuing resolution in September to keep the government funded beyond the October 1 start of the new fiscal year and until a longer-term agreement is reached.

The House Appropriations Committee has approved 11 out of 12 of its FY13 appropriations bills, leaving only the Labor-HHS-Education bill to be considered (see next item). The House has approved six of the committee bills.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved nine of its 12 bills. Still pending in subcommittee are Defense, Interior-Environment, and Legislative Branch.

--House Subcommittee to Mark Up FY13 Labor-HHS-Education Bill on July 18  NEW

The House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee has announced that it will mark up its FY13 funding bill on Wednesday, July 18, at 10:00 a.m.

UNIVERSITY LEADERS URGE POLICYMAKERS TO PREVENT BUDGET SEQUESTER

A group of more than 150 university presidents and chancellors from all 50 states and the District of Columbia sent a letter to President Obama and congressional leaders on July 11 urging them to avoid a year-end budget sequestration and forge a major, balanced, long-term deficit-reduction agreement.

The letter, spearheaded by AAU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, calls on policymakers to find an agreement that will “reduce budget deficits, rein in the nation’s debt, and create economic and job growth to ensure our nation’s long-term fiscal health and to prevent the indiscriminate cuts of sequestration.”

The university leaders say that a prudent and effective deficit reduction agreement should address entitlement spending and tax reform to encourage economic growth and raise revenues. They also point out that even as the overall federal budget might be constrained, certain investments in the future, such as education and scientific research, must be a top priority. “Federal support for scientific research and student financial aid laid the foundation for the dramatic expansion of the 20th century U.S. economy and can do the same in the 21st,” they write.

NON-DEFENSE DISCRETIONARY SPENDING COALITION CALLS FOR BALANCED DEFICIT REDUCTION  NEW

A group of nearly 3,000 organizations—including AAU—delivered a letter to all Members of Congress on July 12 asking them to work together to avert budget sequestration in January by adopting a “balanced approach to deficit reduction” that includes no further cuts to the nondefense discretionary (NDD) portion of the federal budget.
The letter argues that NDD spending is less than one-fifth of the federal budget but has taken a disproportionate share of recent budget cuts. “America’s day-to-day security requires more than military might,” says the letter. “NDD programs support our economy, drive our global competitiveness, and provide an environment where all Americans may lead healthy, productive lives. Only a balanced approach to deficit reduction can restore fiscal stability, and NDD has done its part.”

The letter was organized by the “NDD Summit,” a group of 60 individuals representing the diverse interests in the NDD budget, including health, education, science, law enforcement, housing, workforce, and transportation.

Additional information about the NDD effort is available in a press release and a fact sheet.

AAU ASKS COMMITTEE LEADERS TO REJECT EXCESSIVE USDA REPORTING LANGUAGE UPDATED

AAU sent a letter to the chair and ranking member of the House Agriculture Committee on July 11 expressing strong support for the competitive research funded by the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) and opposing a provision in the draft 2012 Farm Bill (H.R. 6083) that would require extensive new reporting by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) on its current projects and requests for proposals. The Committee approved the bill on July 12 by a vote of 35 to 11, with no change in the problematic provision.

The provision, Section 7513, would require the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture, where AFRI is based, to provide, as part of the President’s annual budget submission, details about upcoming requests for applications, as well as “a report containing a description of the agricultural research, extension, and education activities” carried out in the previous fiscal year. This would include an analysis of whether the work was duplicative of research conducted by other federal agencies, state entities, universities, or private industry.

AAU warned in its letter, “We are concerned that the reported information could be used to inject political or parochial pressures into the determination of areas of emphasis, thus reducing the capacity of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to support the most promising research and thereby impairing the quality of our national agricultural research program.”

The language is also contained in the Senate-passed version of the Farm Bill (Sec. 7512 of S. 3240). However, major differences between the House and Senate versions of the legislation are expected to make it difficult to reach a compromise. The result could be a short-term extension of the current authorization, which is set to expire on September 30th.

OTHER

NEW ORGANIZATION SEEKS TO BOLSTER COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING AT USDA NEW
University representatives are encouraged to participate in the online launch next week of a new organization that aims to help increase funding for the competitive, investigator-initiated agricultural research supported by AFRI in the USDA.

The new group, Supporters of Agricultural Research (SOAR), of which AAU is a founding member, will hold the online launch event on Wednesday, July 25, at 11:00 a.m. EDT. All are welcome to join the webcast, but must register in advance here.

As stated in the invitation, “SOAR is a new organization working to build a coalition of farm and consumer groups, universities, and scientific organizations that will encourage federal science policy to generate the agriculture innovations America and the world urgently need.” Participants in the launch event include: William Danforth, chancellor emeritus of Washington University in St. Louis and chair of the Board of Trustees of the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center; Donald Kennedy, president emeritus of Stanford University, former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration and former editor-in-chief of Science; Roger Beachy, former chief scientist at USDA and the first director of the agency's National Institute of Food and Agriculture; and Carol Tucker Foreman, Distinguished Fellow at the Consumer Federation of America's Food Policy Institute and a nationally known expert on food safety.

ASSOCIATIONS URGE NLRB TO COMPLY WITH COURT RULING ON FACULTY UNIONIZATION ISSUE

The American Council on Education (ACE), acting on behalf of six higher education associations, including AAU, submitted an amicus brief to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) on July 6 regarding the Point Park University case. The case deals with the question of whether faculty members at private colleges and universities seeking union representation are employees covered by the National Labor Relations Act or are excluded as managers. In the case, faculty members at Pittsburgh-based Point Park University voted in favor of unionization but the university challenged the election. Following NLRB regional and federal court decisions, the full Board has decided to take up the case.

The ACE-led brief argues that rather than calling for amicus briefs from third parties, the NLRB should comply with the 2006 ruling of the D.C. Circuit Court without further delay. That decision remanded the case back to the Board to identify which of the factors set forth by the Supreme Court’s 1980 decision in NLRB v. Yeshiva University were most significant in deciding whether faculty members are statutory employees or managers. The brief argues that Yeshiva remains valid today: “Recent research studies and articles confirm that faculties still have influence over areas such as curriculum, the establishment of teaching standards, academic performance, and standards for promotion and tenure.”

The brief was filed on behalf of AAU, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Council of Independent Colleges, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania, and the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources.

NEW REPORT SAYS PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY ARE WORSE THAN REALITY
A new report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy says that for a variety of reasons and in spite of increasing enrollment rates, “most people do not question the idea that college is unaffordable.”

The report, “Is College Affordable? In Search of a Meaningful Definition,” says that rising college prices, stagnating incomes, and diminished asset values have led to the widespread view that college is “unaffordable” for more and more people. Contributing to these misperceptions is the fact that the public significantly overestimates the price of college and that tuition pricing and student aid systems are so complex that many people do not realize the extent to which the “net price” that many students pay is lower than the published price.

Among the observations in the report:

- Affordability is unavoidably subjective;
- In contrast to housing and health care, it is difficult for people to think of college as an investment that generates benefits over a longer period and can reasonably be paid for by installments over time;
- Although many students and families have very real difficulties paying for college, the perception of college affordability is often worse than the reality; and
- Postsecondary education is an investment with a high average rate of return, but it does not pay off equally well for all.

Among suggestions in the report:

- Pricing and financial aid systems should be simplified and made more transparent and predictable;
- Creative communication strategies are needed to give students and families a greater understanding of the monetary and non-monetary benefits of postsecondary education;
- Student loan programs should include adequate protections for those who are unable to repay their education debts; and
- Grand aid and subsidies provided through the tax code should be better targeted to disadvantaged students.

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