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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE
The House and Senate are in recess. Both chambers are scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday, November 13, following the elections.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

TASK FORCE ON AMERICAN INNOVATION URGES POLICYMAKERS TO AVOID BUDGET SEQUESTER

On October 2, the Task Force on American Innovation, in which AAU participates, sent a letter to the President and House and Senate leaders urging them to reach a budget agreement that not only avoids the budget sequestration scheduled for January 2 but also achieves “significant long-term deficit reduction.” The letter was signed on behalf of the Task Force by 19 business and higher education leaders, including Texas Instruments CEO Richard K. Templeton, who chairs the Task Force, AAU President Hunter Rawlings, and seven AAU university presidents and chancellors.

The letter asserts that all parts of the federal budget should be on the table for deficit reduction, but that nearly all deficit measures so far have focused on discretionary spending, where both defense and nondefense research funding is based. But research “drives innovation, productivity, job creation, and economic growth,” says the Task Force, so while reducing deficits is necessary for achieving long-term prosperity, “it is equally necessary that we continue to prioritize spending on science and technology.” The letter concludes, “We urge you to take actions that prevent the upcoming budget sequestration and enable this generation to leave future generations a legacy not of excessive debt and limited prospects but of renewed technological leadership and economic opportunity.”
RESEARCH COMMUNITY RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT NIH PROVISIONS IN HOUSE FUNDING BILL

A group of 207 organizations and institutions, including AAU, sent a letter to House appropriators on October 1 expressing concerns about several provisions related to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the committee’s FY13 Labor-HHS-Education funding bill. The letter reads in part:

“…[W]e believe the funding level provided for NIH in the legislation falls short of what is needed to ensure U.S. global competitiveness in medical research and advance critical scientific discoveries that improve human health,” says the letter, which went to Rep. Dennis Rehberg (R-MT), who chairs the subcommittee that drafted the bill, and the panel’s ranking Democrat, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT). It adds that many of the policy provisions in the bill “over-regulate NIH and may inadvertently impede the agency’s ongoing efforts to improve the stewardship of its resources.” Among such provisions are ones that would set “arbitrary” boundaries on the number and size of awards, prescribe the ratio of extramural to intramural research funding, further lower the extramural salary cap to Executive Level III, and bar NIH from using funds “for any economic research programs, projects, or activities.”

The letter also addresses an issue that goes beyond NIH. Section 223 of the bill would prohibit the use of funds for any program, project, or activity (PPA) related to research until the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) has certified that the PPA “is of significantly high scientific value” and has a “measurable” impact on public health. The groups point out that it is impossible to certify the impact of a research project before it has been conducted and that in the case of basic research projects, the public health impacts may not be realized for many years. “Imposing these restrictions on fundamental research would delay important advances, at best, and most likely, serve as a permanent barrier to advancing the most innovative and promising research,” says the letter.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

CHAIRMAN BROOKS REQUESTS GAO REVIEW OF REGULATIONS THAT HINDER RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

The chairman of the House Research and Science Education Subcommittee on October 3 asked the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review “regulatory actions that hinder our nation’s research universities.”

In a letter to GAO, Rep. Mo Brooks (R-AL) said that it was evident, based on a recommendation in the National Research Council’s report on research universities, two hearings he convened in his subcommittee to follow up on the report, and additional conversations he held with the university research community, that “the current regulatory environment may be limiting the growth of fundamental basic scientific research.”

“While it is necessary and imperative that research universities maintain transparent and accountable systems to track the use of federal dollars,” he said in the letter, “I am concerned
with the amount of time and resources being spent on duplicative and burdensome paperwork and red tape in the conduct of federally funded scientific research.”

The chairman asked GAO to look at three general questions: What federal requirements, not limited to legislative mandates, reporting requirements and regulations create reporting burdens for research universities; how research university requirements under OMB Circulars A-21, A-133 and Federal Acquisition Regulation 4.703 balance regulatory burden with accountability for federal funds; and what might be the potential benefits and disadvantages of modifying requirements, including those “that experts and universities have identified as most burdensome.”

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