CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

Neither chamber met today. When the Senate convenes on Monday, February 11, it will continue consideration of the Violence against Women Act reauthorization (S. 47). The House will reconvene on Tuesday, February 12, to consider legislation under suspension. The two chambers will meet in joint session that evening for the President’s State of the Union address.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

POLICYMAKERS DECRY THE BUDGET SEQUESTER, BUT NO DEAL SEEMS IN SIGHT  NEW

Policymakers have begun speaking out in earnest about the dangers to government services and to the fragile economic recovery if Congress fails to block the budget sequester scheduled to go into effect on March 1. But even as they cite the damaging effects on such government services as food safety inspections, air traffic control, and military readiness, Democrats and Republicans seem no closer to reaching a deal to prevent the sequester, which would impose $85 billion in across-the-board spending cuts on defense and nondefense programs over the remainder of FY13.

Senate Democrats are working to develop a replacement plan of spending cuts and tax loophole closings, which could be considered on the Senate floor as early as next week, reports Politico. But Republicans in the House and Senate have rejected any additional tax increases to avert the
House Republicans may offer a stand-alone menu of alternative budget cuts, says **CQ.com**, but those are not expected to be acceptable to Democrats.

The original estimated across-the-board cuts in FY13 under the sequester were 9.4 percent for defense discretionary spending and 8.2 percent for nondefense discretionary spending. The fiscal cliff agreement signed on January 2 lowered those percentages to an estimated 7.3 and 5.1 percent, respectively. However, a memorandum prepared by Senate Budget Committee Chair Patty Murray notes that because the cuts would be absorbed over the last seven months of FY13, “the impact of the cuts will generally not be less dramatic.”

**ORGANIZATIONS TO URGE END TO SEQUESTER AT FEBRUARY 11 PRESS CONFERENCE**

A group representing more than 3,500 organizations from across the defense and domestic sectors will hold a press conference on Monday, February 11, to urge Congress and President Obama to put an immediate end to the sequestration budget cuts. Participants will assert that the budget cuts could send the nation’s economy back into recession and destroy more than two million American jobs.

The press conference has been organized by the Aerospace Industries Association, Nondefense Discretionary United, the Task Force on American Innovation, AAU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. AAU President Hunter Rawlings is among those who will speak during the event.

**MEMBERS OF RESEARCH COMMUNITY URGE CONGRESS TO STOP BUDGET SEQUESTER**

As the March 1 implementation date for the budget sequester approaches, university researchers, administrators, and students from around the country are using video messages to warn policymakers about the dangers to university research of the sequester’s across-the-board cuts in discretionary spending.

The video editorials, solicited through a collaboration by AAU, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and The Science Coalition, are available on the associations’ joint website, ScienceWorksforU.S. As noted in a press release, the videos will be released throughout February “in an effort to impress upon lawmakers the importance of finding deficit reduction solutions that allow the country to continue to invest in basic scientific and medical research and other things that contribute to economic growth, security, and health.”

**UMR ANALYSIS PROJECTS JOB AND ECONOMIC LOSSES FROM NIH FUNDING SEQUESTER**

A new United for Medical Research (UMR) analysis released on February 6 projects that if Congress fails to prevent implementation of the budget sequester on March 1, the 5.1 percent across-the-board cut in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) budget could prompt a loss of 20,500 jobs in the life sciences sector and a $3 billion reduction in new economic activity.
Using the latest 2012 NIH data, UMR’s new analysis also calculates the impact of NIH grant funding on the nation’s economy and health and life sciences industry. The results show the magnitude of NIH’s role as an economic driver, supporting more than 402,000 jobs and $57.8 billion in economic output nationwide, in 2012 alone. The report was authored by economist Everett Ehrlich.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER CANTOR CALLS FOR CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

As part of a wide-ranging speech on February 5, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) mentioned several changes he would like to see in higher education and research, including “reprioritizing” federal research spending away from the social sciences and toward disease cures. His remarks are viewed as a preview of the House Republican leadership’s priorities for the year.

Rep. Cantor said it is “appropriate and necessary for the federal government to ensure funding for basic medical research,” and added, “Funds currently spent by the government on social science—including on politics of all things—would be better spent helping find cures to diseases.”

Regarding higher education, Rep. Cantor said that colleges and universities should give prospective students “reliable information” about unemployment rates and potential earnings by academic major, as well as a breakout of costs “between academic studies and amenities.” (His home state of Virginia already publishes college graduates’ average first-year starting salaries by major.) Rep. Cantor also called for reforming federal student aid to encourage students to earn their degrees faster and said House Republicans would “encourage entrepreneurship in higher education, including for-profit schools.”

In discussing immigration reform, he expressed support for allowing foreign nationals who earn advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at U.S. universities to more easily receive work visas, and said it was time to offer a path to citizenship for children brought to this country illegally by their parents. This last item, which he had previously opposed, is the basis of the DREAM Act.

HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE EXAMINES U.S. COMPETITIVENESS AND R&D

The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee on February 6 held a hearing to look at the status and outlook for the U.S. science and technology enterprise. As described in a committee press release, “witnesses discussed the roles of public versus private investments in R&D and how those investments can make the greatest impact.”

Those testifying were Richard Templeton, chief executive officer of Texas Instruments (TI) and chair of the Task Force on American Innovation, in which AAU participates; Shirley Ann Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI); and Charles Vest, president of the National Academy of Engineering. Their written statements are available here.
Earlier, Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) laid out the Committee’s priorities in a Roll Call op-ed published on February 5. His statement begins:

“As chairman, I want the Science, Space, and Technology Committee to be a place where vision drives the dialogue and politics takes the back seat. The top priorities of the committee will be to promote legislation that encourages scientific discoveries, space exploration and the development of new technologies.”

The chairman’s op-ed concludes:

“As our country continues to face a fiscal crisis, it is clear that Congress needs to cut spending and prioritize the investments that will provide a good return for American taxpayers. STEM education initiatives, space exploration and investments in basic research are the long-term investments that will provide economic growth and help us ensure America’s future prosperity and success.”

In addition, Mr. Templeton of TI and RPI President Shirley Ann Jackson wrote an op-ed in Politico that discusses the harmful impact of the pending sequester on the university-industry-government partnership that has led to technology development and economic prosperity.

The two leaders assert there would be “a significant, long-term, irreparable price to pay if the U.S. government slashes its support for science and engineering and for those who pursue those fields.” They add, “We urge Congress to approach this challenge in a thoughtful, strategic way, allocating scarce funds in a manner that creates economic growth and security both now and in the future. Good times or bad, one must manage for the future. Discovery and innovation is the pathway there.”

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DHS ANNOUNCES CAMPUS RESILIENCE PILOT PROGRAM FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has announced creation of a new campus resilience pilot project, aimed at finding new and innovative ways for colleges and universities to better prepare for and recover from campus emergencies. The project, co-sponsored by the Departments of Education and Justice, will competitively select six colleges or universities around the country to test an emergency preparedness and resilience planning process.

The pilot program was among the recommendations made by the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council (HSAAC), which advises the DHS Secretary about issues related to homeland security and the academic community. AAU President Hunter Rawlings is a member of the panel, which is chaired by Wallace Loh, president of the University of Maryland, College Park.

Those institutions interested in participating in the pilot project must submit applications to DHS by February 22, 2013; the pilot sites will be announced in March.
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