CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
Congress Responds to Heat on FAA Sequester, Senators Offer Dueling Sequester Fixes  NEW
Appropriators to Move Ahead on FY14 Funding Bills  NEW
Fifty-two Senators Urge Strong FY14 Funding for NIH  NEW

EXECUTIVE BRANCH
AAU and COGR Submit Comments on Draft Life Sciences Dual-Use Research Policy
AAU Comments on NIH Proposals on the Biomedical Research Workforce

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House today approved a Senate-passed bill that will allow the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to maintain air traffic control towers at near full capacity (see next item below), along with a measure (H.R. 527) that would complete the privatization of the federal helium reserve. The House will be out of session next week and return the week of May 6. No schedule has been announced at this writing.

The Senate met in pro forma session today, with no legislative business, and will also be out of session next week. When the Senate returns on Monday, May 6, the chamber will resume consideration of legislation that would allow states to collect sales taxes on online purchases (S. 743).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

CONGRESS Responds to Heat on FAA Sequester, Senators Offer Dueling Sequester Fixes  NEW

With Congress beginning to feel the political heat from the across-the-board cuts under the sequester—particularly FAA cuts affecting air travel—Democratic and Republican Senators this week traded dueling proposals for addressing the pain and ended up approving a separate fix for air travelers.

As the sequester-caused furloughs of air traffic controllers kicked in this week, pressure built on Congress to do something about the lengthy and growing delays in airline flights. Although the White House and Democrats had argued against a piecemeal fix to the across-the-board cuts
under the sequester, *Politico* reports, they agreed to a deal that allows the Transportation Department to shift money to the FAA from other transportation accounts. The Senate passed the measure yesterday and the House did so today. It is not clear how this carve-out for the FAA will affect other federal agencies and programs severely affected by the across-the-board budget cuts.

Regarding the government-wide sequester, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) on April 23 sought to bring up a bill (S. 788) to suspend the sequester cuts for the remainder of FY13, paid for by cutting funds allocated to the war in Afghanistan. He said the measure would stop the “painful” cuts for the next five months, giving lawmakers time to work on a long-term deficit-reduction solution, reports *The Hill*. The White House expressed support for the Reid bill, even though the measure did not include the revenue increases the President has said should be part of any negotiations to eliminate the sequester.

As expected, Senate Republicans blocked floor consideration of the Reid bill, calling it an accounting gimmick. The next day, Republicans offered a measure (S. 799) that the Senate had rejected earlier in the year that would give the President flexibility in allocating the sequester cuts. The bill was blocked by Senate Democrats.

**APPROPRIATORS TO MOVE AHEAD ON FY14 FUNDING BILLS**  

With little prospect that Congress will be able to approve a final FY14 budget resolution, House and Senate Appropriations Committee leaders said this week that they plan to begin marking up their FY14 funding bills next month. (See [AAU Weekly Wrap-up, March 22, 2013](#) for more information on the House and Senate FY14 budget resolutions).

House Appropriations Committee Chair Harold Rogers (R-KY) said his panel will use the House-approved FY14 discretionary funding cap of $967 billion, which is $17 billion below the already-tight FY13 funding level of $984 billion. Rep. Rogers and other senior committee Republicans told *CQ.com* that they face difficult choices with bills that will have a “severe” impact on federal programs. “I suspect there will be some who will be shocked,” Rep. Rogers told the publication.

In contrast, Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) is working to get Republicans on her panel to agree to move FY14 funding bills at the pre-sequester level of $1.058 billion, *CQ.com* reports.

**FIFTY-TWO SENATORS URGE STRONG FY14 FUNDING FOR NIH**  

A bipartisan group of 52 Senators today sent Senate appropriators a [letter](#) urging them to maintain a strong commitment to funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the FY14 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill. The letter, led by Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Richard Burr (R-NC), said, “If we are to improve the health of Americans and the quality of their lives, we must continue to invest in areas like biomedical research that have the potential to save money in the future, improve the lives of Americans, and offer an economic return for our Nation.”
EXECUTIVE BRANCH

AAU AND COGR SUBMIT COMMENTS ON DRAFT LIFE SCIENCES DUAL-USE RESEARCH POLICY

AAU and the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) submitted comments to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on April 23 regarding the federal government’s draft Policy for Institutional Oversight of Life Sciences Dual Use Research of Concern (DURC).

The associations’ comments express appreciation for the balance that the policy’s guiding principles seek to strike between allowing critical life science research to advance while mitigating associated risks, and for its recognition that “the proposed oversight requires careful and thoughtful handling of complex scientific challenges.” The comments urge the government “to carefully evaluate the impact of the new policy on life sciences research when making decisions to renew or expand its implementation.” They also provide specific recommendations about the oversight responsibilities of principal investigators, institutions, and federal agencies.

AAU COMMENTS ON NIH PROPOSALS ON THE BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH WORKFORCE

AAU submitted comments to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on April 22 regarding an NIH advisory panel’s recommendations for addressing issues in the education and training of the biomedical research workforce. The comments note that AAU also responded to a 2011 request for information from the panel, the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director Working Group on the Biomedical Workforce.

In general, AAU expresses agreement that it is useful for graduate students and postdocs to create Individual Development Plans (IDPs) with their mentors in order to guide their career paths, but the association urges that IDPs not become an accountability exercise that reduces their value in fostering genuine mentorship. AAU also expresses concern that the proposed cap on support of doctoral students would create incentives for sloppy scholarship as graduate students feel driven to complete their research in a pre-set timeframe. Additionally, the association raises concerns about setting minimum benefits for postdocs, which are complicated by such external factors as state laws and union negotiations; describes the practical challenges in collecting certain types of data on graduate students; cautions against defining too narrowly what constitutes career success outside of academia; and urges NIH not to further reduce salary support in research grants.

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