CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House and Senate each met in pro forma session today, with no business conducted.

Both chambers will return to regular session on Monday, May 6. No legislative program has been announced for the House at this writing; the Senate will resume consideration of legislation that would allow states to collect sales taxes on online purchases (S. 743).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS ENDORSE HOUSE AND SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION TAX BILLS  NEW

Several higher education associations, including AAU, have endorsed House and Senate legislation to streamline and make permanent the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC), which permits certain families to take a tax credit for some college tuition payments.

A group of six associations sent a letter to Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) on April 17 expressing support for his legislation, S. 835. The six were joined by three other higher education associations in sending a similar letter of support on April 30 to Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX) for his bill, H.R. 1738.

Both bills would consolidate the current AOTC with the Lifetime Learning Credit into one simplified, permanent AOTC that would provide up to $2,500 per year in tax relief for students and their families. The bills also would replace the current limit on the number of years a student can use the AOTC with a $15,000 lifetime cap, make the credit refundable up to 40 percent of its value, and better coordinate the interaction of the credit with the Pell Grant.
Senator Schumer’s bill has seven cosponsors; Rep. Doggett’s bill has 72 cosponsors.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

PRESIDENT LAUDS UNIVERSITY SYSTEM AS CROWN JEWEL OF U.S. ECONOMY AND CIVILIZATION

As part of the 150th anniversary celebration of the National Academy of Sciences on April 29, President Barack Obama delivered a wide-ranging speech about the importance of scientific research and the federal investments that support it. Among many positive statements, the President called the nation’s university system “the crown jewel of our economy as well as our civilization.”

During his presentation, the President decried the research cuts forced by the budget sequester, expressed strong support for the continued federal investment in the social sciences, discussed the importance of ensuring that young people are excited about the sciences, and called for protecting “our rigorous peer review system.”

OSTP DIRECTOR STRONGLY DEFENDS MERIT REVIEW AND NSF SUPPORT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Director John Holdren on May 2 offered a strong public defense of merit review in federal research funding and of the important role of the National Science Foundation (NSF) in supporting all areas of science and engineering, including the social sciences.

Dr. Holdren’s remarks followed several related congressional actions: the inclusion of language in the FY13 continuing resolution that requires the NSF director to certify that any political science research that the agency funds demonstrate national security or economic value; a recent draft proposal in the House aimed at adding extra criteria to the NSF grant review process; and a letter from House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) sent to the leadership of NSF asking for background information on five specific NSF grants.

Dr. Holdren told an audience at the AAAS annual forum on science & technology policy that no system of deciding what research the federal government should fund will succeed perfectly. But the system used by NSF, the National Institutes of Health and other agencies “has made that peer-review-based process the gold standard, recognized around the world.” Citing the President’s National Academy of Sciences speech on Monday, he said the Administration will do everything it can to protect that gold standard and, as the President said, ensure “that our scientific research does not fall victim to political maneuvers or agendas that in some ways would impact on the integrity of the process.”

Dr. Holdren offered an equally strong defense of NSF support for research in the social and behavioral sciences. He said:

“Political science research helps us understand the motives and actions of nations and peoples around the world, strengthening our foreign policy, and it helps [us] understand
our own democracy and how to make it stronger. Economics research has clarified not only the economic importance of innovation, but also its determinants, which in turn have helped us craft policies that effectively promote innovation and thus economic growth.

Social and behavioral research has helped us make hurricane warnings more effective, improve methods of instruction and training in school and in the workplace, and manage resources efficiently without centralized regulation. And it has taught us that social-distancing strategies, like staying home from work or school, can be a crucial complement to vaccination strategies when it comes to breaking the transmission of influenza from person to person.”

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