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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House and Senate did not meet today and will each reconvene on Monday, May 13. The Senate at that time will resume consideration of a water resources bill (S. 601). The House next week will hold a vote to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE AND SENATE APPROPRIATORS EXPECT TO BEGIN FY14 BILL MARKUPS SOON  NEW

Although House and Senate leaders regularly express support for returning to “regular order” in the budget and appropriations process, there seems little likelihood that the two chambers will be able to negotiate a final FY14 budget resolution with an agreed-on discretionary spending level over the next few months. There is just too much distance—$91 billion—between the $1.058 billion figure approved in the Senate FY14 budget resolution and the $967 billion figure approved in the House version. The Senate figure assumes repeal of the budget sequester for FY14; the House figure incorporates the FY14 sequester cuts. The House funding level is about $17 billion below the FY13 post-sequester level.

In the meantime, the House Appropriations Committee will shortly begin markups of its FY14 funding bills, beginning with those that traditionally have strong bipartisan support. The panel’s Military Construction-Veterans Affairs subcommittee is expected to mark up its FY14 bill as early as next week, with the expectation of taking the measure to the full committee during the week of May 21. Prior to considering that bill, the committee will also approve its funding allocations—termed 302(b)s after the provision in law—to the 12 individual subcommittees.
Other bills planned for subcommittee markup are Defense in early June, as well as Homeland Security and Agriculture.

Senate appropriators are expected to begin marking up their bills in June.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE BEGINS MARKUP OF COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION BILL  NEW

The Senate Judiciary Committee yesterday began debate on its long-awaited comprehensive immigration reform bill (S. 744). During the all-day session, the panel considered 32 amendments, reports the Washington Post. The markup is expected to last several weeks.

HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS WEIGH IN ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

A group of 13 higher education associations, including AAU, sent a letter to leaders of the Senate Judiciary Committee on May 8 on immigration reform.

The associations’ letter expresses appreciation to Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) for their bipartisan work to move comprehensive immigration reform. The associations offer their support for such aspects of the bill as:

- inclusion of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which offers a path to permanent residency for those brought to this country illegally as children;
- an exemption from the cap on employment-based green cards for those who have earned an advanced science or engineering degree;
- a provision allowing H-1B recipients to revalidate their temporary visas in the U.S. rather than having to return to their home country; and
- removal of the current requirement that students prove they will return home after completing their studies.

The associations also express concern that the bill defines science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degrees too narrowly and suggests using instead the broader Department of Homeland Security definition. They also urge that the bill exempt higher education institutions from the proposed new fees for STEM labor certification and J-1 visas.

OTHER

ACE PAPER FINDS SCANT EVIDENCE OF CONNECTION BETWEEN AID INCREASES, COLLEGE PRICES  NEW

The American Council on Education (ACE) this week released a new white paper that finds little evidence of a connection between changes in federal student financial aid and college tuition...
prices. The paper, “Does Federal Financial Aid Drive up College Prices?” was written by Donald E. Heller, dean of the College of Education at Michigan State University.

Dr. Heller provides a general overview of federal financial aid programs, recent trends in tuition and the economic theory behind financial aid and tuition, and then reviews some of the major interpretations of the Bennett Hypothesis advanced over the years. The “Bennett Hypothesis” is a theory proposed by former Secretary of Education William Bennett in a 1987 New York Times op-ed that the availability of federal student loans, especially those that are subsidized, gives “cover” for colleges and universities to raise tuition because students can cover the increased costs with their loans.

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