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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate did not meet today. The House met to consider legislation to require the Securities and Exchange Commission to perform cost benefit analyses of its regulations (H.R. 1062).

Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, May 20. The Senate will consider the farm bill (S. 954). No House floor schedule has been announced at this writing.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE CONTINUES MARKUP OF IMMIGRATION REFORM BILL  UPDATED

The Senate Judiciary Committee this week continued consideration of its comprehensive immigration reform bill, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744). Markup will resume on Monday, May 20, and is expected to last throughout the week. During the two days of markup this week, the Committee debated and voted on amendments dealing with nonimmigrant visas and the E-Verify employment verification system.

Amendments approved so far by the Committee that are of interest to higher education include:

- Hatch Amendment #9: This amendment was offered by Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Chris Coons (D-DE), three of the original cosponsors of the I-Squared bill, which addresses immigration issues for well-educated foreign nationals. The
amendment increases the H-1B labor certification fee from $500 to $1,000 in order to fund scholarships for low-income students and programs at minority-serving institutions. It was adopted by voice vote.

- **Grassley Amendment #58**: This amendment by Charles Grassley (R-IA) requires that employment opportunities posted on the Department of Labor website include additional information. Job listings would be required to include the title and description of the position, the location where the work would be performed, and the name of the employer. The amendment passed by voice vote.

- **Klobuchar Amendment #3**: This amendment offered by Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Mike Lee (R-UT), and Mazie Hirono (D-HI) allows for the use of videoconferencing technologies to conduct in-person visa interviews. The amendment passed by voice vote.

- **Sessions Amendment #13**: The original amendment offered by Jeff Sessions (R-AL) would have required that any foreign national deemed a potential threat to U.S. national security submit to an interview with a consular officer when applying for a visa. During debate on the amendment, Charles Schumer (D-NY) offered a second-degree amendment that would give Department of State consular officers access to all terrorist databases and records, in order to determine if an applicant is a threat to national security. The modified amendment passed by a vote of 10-8.

- **Grassley Amendment #69**: This amendment addresses concerns about fraudulent activities of sham universities, including their violation of the Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and their failure to comply with reporting requirements under the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. The amendment would put in place new anti-fraud provisions for student visas and require that designated school officials at each institution undergo background checks every three years. Senator Schumer offered a second degree amendment which made minor changes to the original amendment. The modified amendment passed by voice vote.

- **Grassley Amendment #77**: This amendment requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to transmit student visa data from the SEVP to U.S. Customs and Border Protection within 120 days after enactment of the bill. Failure to transmit this information would result in the suspension of the issuance of F and M visas. The amendment passed by voice vote.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE APPROVES BILL ON STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATES**

The House Education and the Workforce Committee on May 16 approved the Smarter Solutions for Students Act (H.R. 1911), a bill to prevent the interest rate on federal subsidized student loans from automatically rising back to 6.8 percent on July 1. The measure, sponsored by Committee Republicans, would create a single interest rate for both subsidized and unsubsidized loans, with the rate set each year by adding 2.5 percent to the 10-year Treasury bond rate. The interest rate on PLUS loans would be set by adding 4.5 percent to the 10-year Treasury bond rate.
In the Senate, Democrats on May 15 introduced an alternative bill, the Student Loan Affordability Act of 2013, which would maintain the student loan interest rate at 3.4 percent for two years using non-education related offsets.

ASSOCIATIONS SUBMIT VIEWS ON HOUSE AND SENATE STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATE BILLS  UPDATED

A number of higher education associations weighed in this week on the House and Senate bills on student loan interest rates.

On May 15, a group of 15 higher education associations, including AAU, sent a letter to leaders of the House Education and the Workforce Committee thanking them for introducing H.R. 1911. The associations expressed support for the bill’s inclusion of a market interest rate tied to economic conditions, with an overall cap to limit risk to student borrowers, as well as the fact that the bill would not eliminate or reduce existing benefits, such as the in-school interest exemption. The letter raised concern, however, that graduate students might face a disproportionate increase in costs under the proposal.

On May 17, a group of 13 higher education associations, also including AAU, sent a similar letter to four Senate Democratic leaders expressing appreciation for the introduction of S. 953. The letter recognized that the Senate bill would prevent an increase in loan rates for two years while Congress examines the loan programs fully in the Higher Education Act reauthorization, without calling for reducing current educational benefits.

REP. ISSA TO INTRODUCE REVISED DATA ACT  NEW

House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-CA) announced at a May 16 Capitol Hill event with Ranking Member Elijah Cummings (D-MD) and Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) that he would introduce a revised version of the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA). The legislation aims to provide the public with “consistent, reliable, and searchable government-wide spending data” on contracts, loans, and grants. The event featured dozens of companies demonstrating government data solutions that would be possible if the legislation became law.

The draft DATA Act will be introduced and marked up by the Committee next Wednesday, May 22. It is markedly different from both the bill that was passed by the House in the last Congress and the Senate version introduced by Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) that was never considered. Rather than imposing significant new reporting requirements on federal grant and contract awardees, the revised bill focuses on setting government data standards through changes in the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA).

A summary released by the Committee describes the major differences between the old and new versions of the House bill. The Committee has also posted a separate summary of the changes the bill would make to FFATA.

The revised bill includes a three-year pilot program to evaluate consolidated financial reporting and its ability to increase transparency and reduce the compliance burden on federal award
recipients. The pilot would include recipients that collectively receive more than $10 billion in federal funds and have received funds from multiple agencies in the form of contracts, grants, and sub-awards.

**EXECUTIVE BRANCH**

**NSB EXTENDS DEADLINE FOR RESPONSES ON RESEARCH ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN**

The National Science Board (NSB) has extended to June 7 the deadline for individual investigators to submit comments on reducing the administrative workload of federally funded research. (The earlier deadline was May 24.)

The [NSB Task Force on Administrative Burdens](#) sent university campuses a request for information (RFI) on March 25 in order to better understand what several reports have indicated is an excessive regulatory burden on federal research awardees’ time. The Task Force is seeking recommendations specifically from principal investigators. The NSB will use the responses to “develop recommendations to ensure investigators’ administrative workload is at an appropriate level.”

**NEW REPORT DISCUSSES WAYS TO HELP VETERANS TRANSITION INTO ENGINEERING CAREERS**

The National Science Foundation and the American Society for Engineering Education have published the results and recommendations from a workshop convened in February to discuss ways to encourage the transition of military veterans into engineering-related careers. The report notes that the agency has recognized for several years that veterans have the potential to significantly increase the size of the science and engineering workforce.

The workshop report calls for building early awareness of engineering-related careers and career pathways among military personnel; ensuring academic recognition of service members’ prior experience; defining and providing supportive academic environments; and providing seamless support from government agencies, academic institutions, and industry.

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