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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House met today to consider H.R. 2231 a measure that would implement a five-year oil and gas leasing program. The Senate did not meet today.

Congress has adjourned for the July 4 recess. The House and Senate are scheduled to reconvene on Monday, July 9.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEES CONTINUE MARKUPS  UPDATED

The Senate Appropriations Committee this week continued to work through its FY14 funding bills, with markup of the Energy-Water bill in subcommittee and full committee, and subcommittee markup of the Transportation-HUD bill. In addition, the full committee approved the FY14 Agriculture and Military Construction-Veterans Affairs bills on June 20, as well as the panel’s subcommittee funding allocations, the so-called 302(b)’s.

The House has taken some action on six of its 12 FY14 appropriations bills. The House has passed the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security bills; the full
Appropriations Committee has also approved the Agriculture, Defense, Energy-Water, and Transportation-HUD bills.

--Senate Bill Would Significantly Increase Funding for Energy Research

The Senate Energy-Water appropriations bill would provide $5.153 billion for the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science, or $287 million above the FY13 enacted level (which does not include the additional FY13 cuts imposed later by the sequester). The measure provides the “highest priorities” for materials and biological research. The Senate funding level contrasts with the House FY14 funding level of $4.7 billion, which is a cut of $223 million from the FY13 enacted level but $32 million above the post-sequester FY13 level.

The Senate bill also would fund the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) at $379 million, which is $114 million above the FY13 enacted level and $329 million above the House FY14 level of $50 million.

--AAU Joins Other Organizations in Urging Support for ARPA-E  

Earlier in the week AAU joined with over fifty other organizations – including scientific societies, industry groups, trade associations, and individual universities – in sending a letter to key Senate and House leaders and Appropriations Committee members urging support for ARPA-E. The letter praised the Senate Energy and Water Development Subcommittee for the funding level provided in their Energy-Water bill for ARPA-E, while noting that the $50 million approved on June 26 by the House Appropriations Committee “would severely limit” the ability of ARPA-E to carry out “its extremely important work on current and future programmatic initiatives.”

--AAU Issues Statement on DOE Office of Science and ARPA-E Funding  

AAU on June 27 issued a statement commending Senate appropriators for providing significant funding increases for the DOE Office of Science and ARPA-E in their FY14 Energy and Water appropriations bill. “We believe these investments are vital to the nation’s ability to maintain its global scientific leadership, to develop diverse and sustainable sources of energy, and to improve health and environmental quality,” AAU President Hunter Rawlings said in the statement.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

SENATE APPROVES IMMIGRATION REFORM BILL  

The Senate on June 27 approved its comprehensive immigration reform bill (S. 744) by a vote of 68 to 32. Following the passage of this historic legislation, AAU issued a statement thanking Senators for approving the bill, saying that the legislation “represents an historic opportunity to move toward an immigration system that is fair and rational and that serves well the economic, social, and educational needs of the nation.”

On June 26, the Senate approved an amendment offered by Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Patrick Leahy (D-VT) which included not only the strengthened border security proposal developed by Senators Bob Corker (R-TN) and John Hoeven (R-ND) aimed at gaining more
conservative votes, but also several important provisions for higher education. The vote was 69 to 29.

The Leahy amendment (#1183) contained language exempting nonprofit education and research institutions from the definitions of “H-1B dependent employer” and “H-1B skilled worker dependent employer.” This language would save institutions from additional administrative burdens. The amendment also would exempt public universities that hire H-1B nonimmigrants from the prohibition against displacing US workers.

--Higher Education Associations Urge Senators to Vote for the Immigration Bill

A group of 14 higher education associations, including AAU, sent all Senators a letter on June 26 urging them to vote for the Senate immigration reform legislation. “This legislation is an historic opportunity for creating an immigration system with bipartisan support that better serves the needs of our country,” said the associations. “We urge you not to let this opportunity pass and respectfully request your support for the bill.”

The higher education community also sent letters on immigration legislation to the Senate on May 8 and June 20. They can be viewed here.

HOUSE OVERSIGHT PANEL REQUESTS NEW STUDY OF NIH AND INDIRECT COSTS OF RESEARCH

The House Energy and Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, chaired by Rep. Tim Murphy (R-PA), has sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) asking the agency to review indirect costs on grants issued by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Rep. Murphy has raised concerns about indirect costs in past Committee hearings and meetings with NIH Director Francis Collins. GAO is already in the midst of a similar study requested by Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL).

SENATE IMPASSE MEANS STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATES WILL RISE ON JULY 1 UPDATED

A bipartisan group of Senators on June 27 introduced the Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act, a bill to prevent interest rates on federally subsidized student loans from doubling on July 1. But CQ.com reports that the measure is a non-starter for many Democrats because it does not include a cap on interest rates. On the same day, Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Kay Hagan (D-NC), with the support of 34 of their Democratic colleagues, unveiled a new proposal to extend the current 3.4 percent fixed interest rate for one year to provide lawmakers more time to negotiate a long-term market-based proposal. With Congress adjourning today for the July 4 recess, CQ.com reports, Senate leaders have conceded that the rates will require a retroactive fix later this summer.

The bipartisan measure, developed by Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Richard Burr (R-NC), Tom Coburn (R-OK), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), August King (I-ME), and Tom Carper (D-DE), would set loan rates for subsidized and unsubsidized undergraduate loans at the Treasury 10-year borrowing rate plus 1.85 percent. The rate for unsubsidized graduate loans would be the 10-year
rate plus 3.4 percent; PLUS loans would be the 10-year rate plus 4.4 percent. The interest rate would remain fixed for the life of a loan, but there would be no cap on the rate for new loans. Students would be able to consolidate their loans and repay them at 8.25 percent, and the plan includes the income-based repayment option.

Even if the Senate had acted before recessing for the Fourth of July, there likely would not have been sufficient time before the recess to reconcile it with the House-passed bill, H.R. 1911.

OTHER

SUPREME COURT ISSUES RULING ON DIVERSITY CASE

The U.S. Supreme Court on June 24 issued its decision on Fisher v. UT Austin, sending the case on the use of race in college admissions back to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. By a vote of 7 to 1, the Court said that the Fifth Circuit had not used “the demanding burden of strict scrutiny articulated in Grutter and Regents of Univ. of Cal. V. Bakke” in upholding the University’s admission plan where race is used as one of several factors in admission.

In a statement following the decision, AAU President Hunter Rawlings said:

“AU is pleased that the ruling does not overrule the Bakke, Grutter, or Gratz decisions, and leaves in place prior rulings that the educational benefits of broadly defined diversity are a compelling interest for those colleges and universities that judge such diversity to be important to achieving their educational missions.”

The American Council on Education issued this statement; the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities statement is here, and the University of Texas statement can be viewed here.

ASSOCIATIONS CREATE SAM SYSTEM TO BETTER CALCULATE GRADUATION RATES

The six major presidentially led higher education associations, including AAU, on June 24 unveiled the website for the Student Achievement Measure, a new initiative that will provide a more comprehensive means of calculating student graduation rates than the methodology currently used by the Department of Education.

The Student Achievement Measure (SAM) will report aggregate outcomes for a group of students who start at a college or university at the same time. Other methods of calculating graduation rates often report only the percentage of students who graduate from the same institution. Using data from the National Student Clearinghouse, SAM will also report the percentage of students who transfer to another institution and whether they have graduated or are still working on their degrees. This methodology will demonstrate more accurately institutions’ contributions to student progress and educational outcomes.

Additional information about SAM, including how institutions can sign up, is available on the SAM website. Institutions will submit their data to the website this fall.
AAU SELECTS EIGHT CAMPUS PROJECT SITES FOR STEM EDUCATION INITIATIVE  NEW

AAU announced on June 24 that it has selected eight AAU member campuses to serve as project sites for the association’s five-year initiative to improve the quality of undergraduate education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields at its member institutions. The project, which was first announced in 2011, is designed to encourage departments in these disciplines at AAU universities to adopt proven, evidence-based teaching practices and to provide faculty with the encouragement, training, and support to do so.

The eight campuses are: Brown University, Michigan State University, The University of Arizona, University of California, Davis, University of Colorado, Boulder, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Pennsylvania, and Washington University in St. Louis. Link to each university name for an article about the institution’s selection

NOTE: The AAU Weekly Wrap-up will not be published next Friday, July 5.

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