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Congress is currently adjourned for the July 4 recess. Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, July 9. The Senate is scheduled to consider a judicial nominee that day, but no program has been announced for the House.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE TO MARK UP LABOR-HHS-EDUCATION BILL NEXT WEEK

The Senate Appropriations Committee plans to mark up its FY14 Labor-HHS-Education funding bill in subcommittee on Tuesday, July 9, and in full committee on Thursday, July 11.

BROAD COALITION URGES STRONG FUNDING FOR NASA SPACE TECHNOLOGY DIRECTORATE  NEW

A group of 39 organizations comprising companies, universities, and nonprofit associations, including AAU, sent a letter to congressional authorizers and appropriators on July 2 urging them to provide $740 million for NASA’s Space Technology Directorate in FY14 and FY15.

“Space Technology creates critical capabilities required for NASA’s future science and exploration missions, enables a vibrant and competitive U.S. space industry, and forges technology-based partnerships across government agencies,” said the letter. “To remain the leader in space exploration, space science and space commerce, we are convinced that NASA must invest in new technologies and capabilities.” The letter expresses concern that the $500
million funding level proposed in the House NASA authorization bill would force drastic cuts in NASA technology partnerships with U.S. industry and academia.

The letter also highlights the role the Space Technology Directorate plays in the development of NASA’s future workforce. “Today, there are approximately 200 graduate students across our nation’s universities who, as a result of the NASA Space Technology Research Fellows Program, have been able to align their research with NASA objectives, contributing to the Agency’s future.”

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

AAU, APLU URGE ADMINISTRATION TO DELAY STEM EDUCATION PROGRAM CONSOLIDATIONS NEW

The presidents of AAU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) sent a letter to senior White House officials on July 2 expressing concern about the Administration’s plan to consolidate several federal science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education programs. They urged the Administration to provide stakeholders and the public an opportunity to comment on its STEM education plan.

The letter, sent by AAU president Hunter Rawlings and APLU president Peter McPherson to Office of Management and Budget Director Sylvia Burwell and Office of Science and Technology Policy Director John Holdren, said the associations agreed that federal STEM education programs would benefit from “greater coordination and coherence.” The association heads expressed concern, however, that the plan appears to have been developed as part of the FY14 budget process rather than as a result of the White House five-year STEM education plan that was published subsequently in late May. The two associations noted that the consolidation process was conducted without transparency or a formal opportunity for public comment.

Also of serious concern, said the letter, is that some federal agencies appear to be unilaterally shutting down or curtailing STEM education programs before Congress has had a chance to weigh in on the proposal. In addition, the plan fails to make clear how agency-specific graduate fellowships and traineeships would continue to meet the mission needs of their agencies if the programs are moved to the National Science Foundation, as proposed.

The associations leaders urged the Administration to set up a formal mechanism for public comment on the proposal and on the federal STEM education five-year plan, similar to the process they employed in soliciting comments on expanding public access to the results of federally funded research. “We believe the Administration’s proposal for STEM education consolidation could benefit from a similar process for stakeholder engagement and comment,” they wrote. “Such a process would help to ensure stakeholder buy-in and ultimately strengthen the resulting policy and make its implementation more effective.”

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