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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate was out of session this week, and the House did not meet today. Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, October 28.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

BUDGET CONFERENCE COMMITTEE TO MEET FORMALLY ON OCTOBER 30  NEW

As the House-Senate conference committee on the FY14 budget prepares for its first formal meeting next Wednesday, October 30, congressional leaders are working to reduce expectations that the panel will reach a grand bargain that includes significant tax and entitlement reform. The leaders’ more modest goal is to find agreement on final spending for FY14 and the means to avoid the next round of sequester cuts scheduled to kick in early next year. The panel has a target deadline of December 13 to come up with an agreement; the current FY14 continuing resolution expires on January 15.

The conference is likely to be difficult. The House-passed FY14 budget resolution caps discretionary spending at $967 billion, which represents the amount set by the Budget Control Act (BCA), including cuts required by sequestration. It also shifts all of the required cuts in defense to the domestic budget, rather than dividing the cuts equally between defense and nondefense, as originally required by the BCA. The Senate-passed FY14 budget resolution ignores the sequestration cuts required by the BCA and sets the top-line discretionary spending level at $1.058 trillion, the original cap required under the BCA without sequestration. CQ.com reports, however, that Senate Democrats are now focused on at least sustaining FY14 spending at the FY13 post-sequester level of $986 billion.
OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN INTRODUCES NEW PATENT LITIGATION BILL  NEW

Rep. Robert Goodlatte (R-VA), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, on October 23 introduced a third version of his legislation aimed at addressing the issue of abusive patent litigation. The Innovation Act (H.R. 3309), which the chairman introduced with bipartisan committee support, will be the subject of a full committee hearing on Tuesday, October 29.

The higher education associations’ Patent Implementation Task Force is reviewing the legislation and will submit comments on the bill.

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COLLEGE BOARD ISSUES ANNUAL REPORTS ON TRENDS IN COLLEGE PRICING AND STUDENT AID

The College Board on October 22 issued its annual reports on college pricing and student aid, which show that increases in average tuition and fees at public and private four-year colleges and universities have slowed, particularly at public institutions. In addition, 49 percent of all student aid in school year 2012-13 was in the form of grants, the highest percentage in the past decade, with 8.8 million students receiving federal Pell Grants.

The publication, Trends in College Pricing 2013, shows that the 2.9-percent increase in average in-state tuition and fees at public colleges and universities was the lowest percentage increase in 30 years. The average published tuition and fees for those institutions was $8,893, while the “net” price, or the amount after subtracting grant aid, was $3,120. For private nonprofit colleges and universities, published tuition and fees rose by an average of 3.8 percent, or slightly less than in previous years. The average published tuition and fees for those institutions was $30,094, with an average net price of $12,460.

The publication, Trends in Student Aid, 2013, reports that undergraduate students in school year 2012-13 received an average of $13,730 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student in financial aid, including $7,190 in grants from all sources and $4,900 in federal loans. Federal grant aid declined by one percent from the previous year, while total grant aid per FTE increased by one percent. Of total undergraduate grant aid, the federal government provided 45 percent, colleges and universities provided 38 percent, state governments provided eight percent, and employers and other private sources provided 13 percent.

In the same school year, graduate students received an average of $25,730 per FTE student in financial aid, including $7,800 in grants and $16,240 in federal loans.

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