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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE NEW

The House and Senate were in session earlier today and have adjourned for the week. The Senate will return on Monday, April 7, to continue work on a bipartisan package that addresses the home mortgage crisis. It may also consider an omnibus public lands bill (S. 2739). The House will return to session on Tuesday, April 8. Next week’s agenda includes a land conservation bill (H.R. 2016) and a measure to require the Environmental Protection Agency to help states test beach water for contaminants (H.R. 2537).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

FY08 SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING BILL TAKING SHAPE NEW

CQToday reports that the FY08 supplemental appropriations bill that is now being drafted by the House Appropriations Committee is expected to contain close to the $102.5 billion in war funding that the Pentagon has requested for the rest of this year. Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Murtha (D-PA) proposes to redirect $8-$9 billion from the total to other defense needs, such as the military’s domestic medical infrastructure and base construction.
House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI) reportedly has not yet signed off on the draft bill.

The publication reports that among possible areas for additional domestic spending is $350 million for science (see next item). Other possibilities include funding for federal parks and lands damaged in recent storms and local law enforcement grants. The bill also may carry economic stimulus measures, such as infrastructure spending and unemployment insurance.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) held a meeting yesterday with Democratic appropriators to discuss a Senate strategy for the supplemental. Among the proposals considered, says CQToday, was one to increase education benefits for veterans and mandate longer periods between troop deployments.

**BROAD COALITION TO URGE FY08 SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING FOR SCIENCE**

A broad coalition of academic, business, and association communities is gathering signatures for letters to the President and leaders of the House and Senate in support of including additional science funding in the FY08 supplemental appropriations bill. The letters urge these leaders “to remain open to the inclusion of funding” for scientific research and for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education as the supplemental measure is developed.

**HOUSE AND SENATE LETTERS URGE ADDED FY09 FUNDING FOR DOE OFFICE OF SCIENCE**

Bipartisan groups in the House and Senate have sent letters to their respective appropriations committee leaders urging them to provide the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science with the President’s requested FY09 budget of $4.7 billion. The House letter was signed by 86 Members; the Senate letter had 68 signatures.

Members of the CFR are encouraged to thank their Representatives and Senators who signed the letters. Special thanks should be given to the letters’ sponsors: Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Reps. Judy Biggert (R-IL), Ellen Tauscher (D-CA), Rush Holt (D-NJ), and Zoe Lofgren (D-CA).

**OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

**AAU EXPRESSES CONCERNS ABOUT SENATE FALSE CLAIMS ACT LEGISLATION UPDATED**

AAU sent a letter to leaders of the Senate Judiciary Committee on March 31 expressing strong concerns that the False Claims Correction Act of 2007 (S. 2041), which the panel marked up on April 3, would have negative and unintended consequences for colleges and universities. Although the panel addressed some university concerns during markup, significant problems remain with the bill. AAU will provide additional information in the near future.

**SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE CONTINUES TO REFINE PATENT REFORM BILL**
Leaders of the Senate Judiciary Committee continue to consider changes in the committee-passed patent reform bill (S. 1145) in an effort to gain the widest possible support before taking the measure to the Senate floor. The panel approved its bill (S. 1145) on January 24, 2008, but committee chairman Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and ranking member Arlen Specter (R-PA) have continued to work with the various sectors to resolve additional issues.

Information about the higher education associations’ position on S. 1145 is available in a letter and statement sent to Senators Leahy and Specter on February 5.

**EXECUTIVE BRANCH**

**DHS PROPOSES 17-MONTH EXTENSION OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING FOR CERTAIN HIGHLY SKILLED FOREIGN STUDENTS**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today released an interim final rule that will extend the period for Optional Practical Training (OPT) for certain foreign students from 12 to 29 months. The extension will be available to F-1 non-immigrant students who have completed a degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, and have accepted employment with an employer enrolled in the E-Verify employment verification program. The OPT extension will not apply to students in other disciplines.

The interim final rule also addresses a situation commonly known as the "cap gap," in which students’ work authorizations expire before they can obtain their H-1B visas. Under this interim final rule, a student's OPT status will be extended automatically if that student's H-1B petition has been approved by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. There usually is a five-month gap between the expiration of a student’s OPT status and the beginning of the student’s H-1B status, so the automatic extension in the interim final rule will allow students to continue to work in the U.S. until their H-1B petitions takes effect.

DHS is accepting written comments on the interim final rule. Comments should be submitted to:

Department of Homeland Security  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Policy  
425 I Street, NW  
Room 7257  
Washington, D.C. 20536

The interim final rule and information about the program are available at:  

**CAMPUSES ENCOURAGED TO COMMENT ON NIH OPEN-ACCESS POLICY**

As expected, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) published a notice in the Federal Register on March 25 that formally requests comments on implementation of the agency’s open-access policy. Comments are due by May 31, 2008; NIH will summarize and respond to the comments in September.

AAU institutions are encouraged to respond to the NIH request.
The policy, which was enacted into law as part of the FY08 omnibus appropriations act (P.L. 110-161), will go into effect on Monday, April 7. It will require those who publish research partly or fully funded by NIH to provide a copy of the manuscript to NIH for posting on its PubMed Central public repository within 12 months of its acceptance for publication.

As reported on March 21, AAU reaffirmed its support for the open-access policy in remarks made by AAU Vice President for Federal Relations Patrick White at a public meeting held at NIH on March 20. AAU staff will provide the CFR with a more detailed memorandum on this issue in the near future.

Additional information about the policy, including FAQs, is available on the NIH Web site.

OTHER

CAMPUS REPRESENTATIVES ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND APRIL 29 CONVOCATION ON “GATHERING STORM” FOLLOW-UP

Representatives from AAU campuses—including members of the CFR and other university administrators—are encouraged to attend a convocation on Tuesday, April 29, sponsored by the National Academies of Science that follows up on the NAS 2005 report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm.” The purpose of the meeting is to take stock of developments since publication of the report—such as enactment of the America COMPETES Act—and to “strengthen engagement among the various stakeholders seeking to renew American innovation and explore how progress can be sustained and accelerated.”

Information about the event, including the draft agenda and how to register, is available here.

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