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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The two-week spring recess will end on Monday, March 31, when both houses of Congress reconvene. In the House, recorded votes will be delayed until 6:30 p.m., while the Senate will postpone recorded votes until Tuesday, April 1.

CongressDaily reports that Senator Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) hopes that next week the Senate will revisit the Democrats’ housing stimulus package. If Republicans consent, the debate could take the rest of the week. The Senate could also consider patent reform. Also on the agenda for possible action in April and May are the FY08 supplemental spending bill, the Defense authorization bill, an overhaul of the Food and Drug Administration, and an energy tax package.

The House schedule for next week is unclear, reports CongressDaily, but legislation to authorize expanded support for combating HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and other diseases overseas is likely to be the only major bill considered. Democratic leadership aides tell the publication that the House is expected to consider over the next several weeks the FY08 supplemental funding bill and possibly the FY09 appropriations bills for Defense, Homeland Security, and Military Construction. The House and Senate also may consider legislation dealing with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and an agreement on the farm bill.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE TO MARK UP FY08 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS BILL ON APRIL 16  NEW
CongressDaily reported this afternoon that the House Appropriations Committee plans to mark up the FY08 Iraq war supplemental appropriations bill on Wednesday, April 16. The committee plans to take the measure to the House floor the following week. According to the publication, Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI) and Democratic leaders will meet next week to discuss the framework for the bill. A senior Democratic leadership aide tells CongressDaily that the measure likely will include “more domestic spending than earlier war-funding bills.” The President has not said what level of added domestic spending he might accept in the supplemental bill.

Many in the scientific and business communities, including AAU, have urged appropriators to add significant funding for science programs in the FY08 supplemental funding bill. AAU issued a statement on March 19 by its president, Robert M. Berdahl, praising a group of eight Senators for their letter to Senate appropriators asking them to include $350 million for this purpose in the supplemental bill. The statement read, in part:

“We appreciate the efforts of these Senators to begin to correct a critical mistake made last year by Congress and the President. The failure of Congress and the President to provide new investments in science in FY08 that were both promised and needed is causing real harm to our nation’s scientific enterprise and therefore to the nation’s long-term economic competitiveness.”

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

AAU SUBMITS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEA CONFERENCE

On March 24, AAU submitted to the leaders of the House and Senate education committees the association’s specific recommendations for conferees on the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization legislation. The letter, which complements the community letter submitted on February 28, expresses appreciation for several positive elements in the House and Senate bills, including making Pell Grants available year-round, developing an easier-to-use financial aid form, and creating a new graduate fellowship program. The letter also urges conferees to retain provisions that would limit the authority of the Department of Education to regulate standards of student achievement.

The letter also identifies four areas of special concern:

- overly prescriptive requirements for teacher training, including a provision in the Senate bill that would link teacher training curricula to institutional eligibility for federal student aid;
- new requirements in the House bill pertaining to college costs, including a mandate that institutions whose tuitions rise above a certain percentage report to the Department of Education how they will reduce net tuition, and requiring institutions with the highest percentage tuition increases to create “quality efficiency task forces” to review and analyze operations and reduce net tuition;
- the number of new reporting requirements in both bills, many of which are unnecessary and/or duplicative and would impose significant compliance costs in exchange for little, if any, benefit; and
• new application and dispute resolution requirements in the Senate bill for Title VI international education programs that would set an inappropriate precedent for federal involvement in instruction and curriculum.

REPUBLICAN HOUSE MEMBERS URGE CHANGES IN HEA TITLE II PROVISIONS

A group of 15 Republican Members of the House has written to leaders of the House and Senate education committees urging them to drop certain Title II Teacher Development provisions in each of the HEA reauthorization bills because they inappropriately link teacher education curricula to an institution’s eligibility to receive federal aid.

The letter says the Members support maintaining the intent of the provisions by reporting teacher development information as part of the Institutional and Program Report Card. The letter adds, however, that it would be “an expansive overreach of federal authority to mandate curriculum development for every college in the nation that offers teacher preparation…”

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

PRESIDENT SIGNS HEA EXTENSION TO APRIL 30

The President signed legislation (S. 2733) on March 24 that extends the Higher Education Act (HEA) through April 30, 2008, one month beyond the current extension, which expires on March 31. The latest extension, which was cleared by Congress on March 12, is necessary to provide additional time for the House and Senate to reconcile the differences in their respective HEA reauthorization bills (H.R. 4137, S. 1642).

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