Friday, March 21, 2008

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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The two-week House spring recess will end on Monday, March 31, when Members reconvene, with any recorded votes delayed until after 6:30 p.m. The Senate also is observing the two-week spring break but remains in pro forma session to keep the President from making recess appointments. The Senate also will reconvene on March 31.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

AAU LAUDS SENATORS’ LETTER REQUESTING FY08 SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING FOR SCIENCE

AAU has issued a statement praising a group of eight Senators for their letter to Senate appropriators asking them to add $350 million for science programs to the FY08 supplemental appropriations bill. The funding would provide additional support for the Department of Energy Office of Science and the National Science Foundation.

The AAU statement said, 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.”
Some 179 Members of the House have signed a letter to House appropriators urging them to provide a 6.5-percent increase for the National Institutes of Health in FY09.

The letter, sponsored by Reps. Edward Markey (D-MA) and David Reichert (R-WA), notes that the President’s proposal to flat-fund NIH at the FY08 level “is deeply troubling given the high rate of biomedical inflation.” It goes on to say that the short-term impact of flat funding is a reduced number of NIH-funded grants. It adds, “More broadly, inadequate funding for biomedical research delays or ends cutting-edge research, making it more difficult to retain talented American researchers in the United States. Even worse, flat funding further impedes our ability to mitigate or delay the onset of the chronic diseases, which are the greatest contributor to spiraling health care costs.”

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

AAU AND COGR COMMENT ON NIH PEER REVIEW SELF-STUDY

AAU and the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) have submitted comments on the final draft of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) 2007-2008 Peer Review Self-Study. The draft report, which has been submitted to NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, identifies the most significant challenges facing the NIH peer review system and proposes actions for addressing them. The document was released publicly on February 29, with comments due by March 17.

NIH notes in an overview on its Web site that the presentation of the self-study to Dr. Zerhouni marked "the end of the diagnostic phase of the peer review enhancement effort," and that "NIH will formally announce the new initiatives it plans to implement in the spring of 2008."

AAU and COGR focused their comments on the elements of the self-study that address the partnership between research universities and NIH in supporting biomedical research. The two associations also expressed opposition to a recommendation that investigators commit a minimum 20 percent of effort on each NIH award.

AAU REITERATES SUPPORT FOR NIH OPEN ACCESS POLICY

AAU reaffirmed its support of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) policy on open access at a public meeting held March 20 at NIH.

AAU Vice President for Federal Relations Patrick White told meeting participants of AAU’s longstanding support for the policy, which as of April 7, 2008, will require those who publish research funded all or in part by NIH to provide a copy of the manuscript to NIH for posting on the agency’s PubMed Central public repository within 12 months of publication.

Mr. White requested NIH to work with publishers to implement a "modified standard copyright agreement acknowledging that the author retains the right to provide a copy of the final manuscript to NIH." He said that such an agreement would reduce significantly the administrative burden associated with the open access policy.
Members of the CFR are encouraged to attend The Science Coalition’s next headliner breakfast, which will feature freshman Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ), a member of the House Science and Technology Committee and its Subcommittee on Energy and Environment. The event will be held on Tuesday, April 15, at 9:00 a.m. EDT, at Hotel George in Washington, D.C. Those wishing to attend should contact Rochelle Behrens at rbehrens@qga.com.