FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2008

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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE   NEW

The House did not meet today; the Senate did meet but with no roll call votes.

Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, March 10. Next week, they will consider their respective versions of the FY09 budget resolution (see item below). The House also will consider a proposal to create an outside panel to review ethics complaints against House Members (H. Res. 895), and may also debate changes to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE AND SENATE FY09 BUDGET RESOLUTIONS ADD FUNDING FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

The FY09 budget resolutions approved on March 6 by the House and Senate budget committees would allow for significant funding increases for research and education in FY09. The House Budget Committee approved its version of the FY09 budget resolution early this morning on a party-line vote of 22-16; the Senate Budget Committee voted out its version this afternoon on a party-line vote of 12-10.

The annual budget resolution, which is not signed into law by the President, provides a blueprint for congressional spending across broad budget categories (budget functions) as well as guidance

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for changes in taxes and mandatory programs. Congress determines actual funding levels for discretionary programs through the appropriations process.

**Function 250 (General Science and Space).** The House budget resolution would provide $29.8 billion in discretionary spending for this function, which includes the National Science Foundation (NSF) and NASA. The function total is $2.5 billion above FY08 funding and $3.79 billion above the President’s FY09 request. The House measure includes a “sense of the House” statement that encourages appropriators to fund programs authorized under the America COMPETES Act, including NSF and the Department of Energy Office of Science.

The Senate Budget Committee has not yet provided a funding chart that shows the panel’s assumption for Function 250, but Chairman Kent Conrad’s (D-ND) overview says that the Senate budget resolution would provide NASA with $18.7 billion, which is about $1.2 billion above FY08 funding and $1 billion more than the President’s FY09 request.

**Function 270 (Energy).** The House measure would provide about $6 billion for energy programs, including the Department of Energy’s Office of Science. This is about $1.1 billion more than FY08 funding and $1.2 billion more than the President’s FY09 request. The Senate measure would provide $8.45 billion in discretionary spending for Function 270. Chairman Conrad’s overview says this would provide significant increases for such efforts as energy conservation and renewable programs—including “energy grants for universities and institutions”—fossil energy R&D, electricity delivery and reliability, and weatherization assistance. The overview says this would be “the highest discretionary spending level for the energy function since 1981.”

**Function 500 (Education, Training, Employment, and Social Services).** The House budget resolution would provide $85.3 billion in discretionary spending, which is $5.7 billion higher than the President’s FY09 request and about $5.5 billion more than FY08 funding.

The Senate budget resolution would provide $88.4 billion, or about $3 billion above the House number. The Chairman’s overview says the measure would increase funding for the Department of Education by $5.4 billion above the President’s FY09 request. It rejects the Administration’s proposal to cut 48 education programs. The Senate version also includes an education reserve fund to provide or extend various tax credits and deductions, such as the expired tuition tax deduction. The Chairman’s overview does not specify how such revenue measures would be paid for.

**Function 550 (Health).** The House version would provide $57.6 billion for health programs, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This is $4.4 billion more than FY08 funding and $3 billion over the President’s FY09 request.

The Senate Budget Committee has not yet provided a funding chart that shows the panel’s assumption for this function. But Chairman Conrad’s overview says the measure assumes funding for NIH of $30 billion, which is $9.5 billion more than both FY08 funding and the President’s FY09 request.

NEW DEMOCRATS URGE FULL FUNDING FOR AMERICA COMPETES PROGRAMS IN FY09  *UPDATED*

A group of 29 members of the House New Democrats group wrote to leaders of the House Budget Committee on February 29 urging them to allocate sufficient resources in the FY09
budget resolution to fully fund programs authorized by the America COMPETES Act (P.L. 110-69), and to provide a major funding increase for the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The letter urged Committee Chairman John Spratt (D-SC) and Ranking Member Paul Ryan (R-WI) to provide room in the FY09 budget resolution specifically for programs in the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Department of Education. It also urged the committee leaders to assume a six-percent increase for NIH in the budget resolution to keep pace with biomedical research inflation.

As discussed above, the House FY09 budget resolution does add funding for America COMPETES Act programs, and assumes a $950 million increase for NIH.

**THIRTY-FOUR SENATORS URGE PELL GRANT INCREASE IN FY09**

A bipartisan group of 34 Senators sent a letter to Senate Budget Committee leaders on February 29 asking them to include in their budget assumptions for the FY09 budget resolution the “highest possible increase” in the Pell Grant maximum award. The letter also asked the leaders to reject the Administration’s proposal to cut funding for other programs that assist low-income students, including the Leveraging Education Assistance Partnership program, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and the Perkins Loan program.

As discussed above, the Senate budget resolution rejects the Administration’s proposed cut of 48 education programs and would increase funding for the Department of Education by $5.4 billion above the President’s request. Committee Chairman Kent Conrad’s (D-ND) overview includes Pell Grants among the education programs singled out for additional funding, but provides no further details.

**HARVARD PRESIDENT KICKS OFF MARCH 11 PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE IMPACT OF FLAT FUNDING OF NIH; HELP COMMITTEE HEARING WILL FOLLOW**

Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust and other leaders from AAU universities will headline a press conference on Tuesday, March 11, from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. called to discuss a new report on how stagnant funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is harming biomedical research and deterring young people from careers in biomedical research.

The event will unveil a new report, “A Broken Pipeline? Flat Funding of the NIH Puts a Generation of Science at Risk.”

Among the university leaders who will discuss the report are President Faust, Ohio State Board of Regents Chancellor Eric Fingerhut, and University of Wisconsin School of Medicine Dean Robert Golden. The report, which follows up on one released last year, was co-authored by Brown University, Duke University, Harvard University, The Ohio State University, Partners HealthCare, the University of California, Los Angeles, and Vanderbilt University. Copies of the report will be available at the press conference.

Following the press conference, at 11:00 a.m., the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) will conduct a hearing entitled “The Broken Pipeline: Losing
Opportunities in the Life Sciences.” The hearing will be held in 430 Dirksen Senate Office Building. Among those joining President Faust as witnesses will be Dr. Edward Miller, dean of the medical faculty at The Johns Hopkins University.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS SEND HEA CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS  UPDATED

The higher education community on February 29 sent House and Senate education committee leaders recommendations for the conference on legislation to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA). Fourteen higher education associations, including AAU, signed on to the package, which was organized by the American Council on Education. The extensive set of recommendations includes views and suggestions on key issues—including accreditation, college costs, and new reporting requirements—to be considered during the conference on the House and Senate measures (H.R. 4137 and S. 1642).

The package of community recommendations is available on the AAU Web site.

On March 5, several higher education associations, including AAU, sent two additional letters on conference issues.

The first letter opposes a provision in the Senate version of the bill that would require institutions to calculate student completion rates by 48 different measures, including gender, racial and ethnic subgroup, and whether the individual received a Pell Grant or loan. The primary objection, says the letter, is that the proposal takes already-flawed federal data about graduation rates and “by further disaggregating them, makes them even more misleading.”

The second letter urges conferees to add a three-year calculation for determining an institution’s cohort default rate (CDR), in addition to the two-year calculation in current law. Adding the three-year calculation, the letter says, “will provide a more accurate picture of long-term institutional CDRs.” The letter adds that it is important also to retain the two-year calculation as a means of providing an “early warning of schools with high numbers of defaulters.”

Conferees have not been named. However, preliminary discussions have begun between bipartisan staff of the House Education and Labor and Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committees. More staff discussions are scheduled next week.

OTHER

HUMANITIES ADVOCACY PROGRAM BRINGS HUNDREDS TO CAPITAL  NEW

More than 200 individuals representing libraries, museums, associations, and academic institutions from around the country participated in this year’s Humanities Advocacy program on March 3-4 in Washington, D.C.

The group heard from National Academy of Engineering President Charles M. Vest about the importance of the humanities to the future of the nation, and participated in roundtable discussions with officials from such federal agencies as the National Endowment for the
Humanities and the Department of Education. Participants then carried their message about the value of the humanities to Capitol Hill, where they held more than 120 meetings with Members of the House and Senate. At the reception that evening, Rep. Norman Dicks (D-WA), chair of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee that funds NEH, was presented with the Sidney R. Yates Award for Distinguished Public Service.

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY NAMES NICHOLAS ZEPPOS AS CHANCELLOR

Vanderbilt University announced last weekend that Nicholas S. Zeppos has been selected as the next chancellor of the university, effective immediately. Mr. Zeppos, who received a baccalaureate degree in history and a law degree from the University of Wisconsin, has been provost and vice chancellor at Vanderbilt for the past six years. He first joined the Vanderbilt faculty in 1987 as an assistant professor in the law school, and subsequently served as associate dean and then associate provost before being named provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs in 2002.

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