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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE NEW
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

The Senate convened on Wednesday and today for pro forma sessions, with no recorded votes. The chamber will reconvene for a pro forma session on Tuesday, January 24, and on January 25 in regular session. The House remains out of session and will return on Tuesday, January 31, in time for the President’s State of the Union address that evening.

CongressDaily reports that the Senate Judiciary Committee plans to vote January 24 on Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito, with the full Senate expected to begin debate on the nomination the next day. Floor debate is expected to continue Thursday with a vote tentatively scheduled for Friday, January 27. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) has said that if Democrats oppose Alito's nomination and draw out the debate, he will keep the Senate in session until Saturday to vote on the nomination.

The Senate may also vote next week on the nomination of Ben Bernanke to succeed Alan Greenspan as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. Senator Frist’s office told CongressDaily that the chamber would vote on the nomination before Mr. Greenspan retires January 31.

Among the early legislative priorities for the Senate will be reauthorization of the USA PATRIOT Act, lobbying reform, and immigration and border security legislation.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ANNOUNCES TWO NEW SUBCOMMITTEE CLERKS NEW

The Senate Appropriations Committee has announced two new subcommittee clerks. Art Cameron will move up to clerk at the Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations Subcommittee.
He replaces Katherine Hennessey, who has moved to the private sector. At the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, staffer Fitz Elder will replace John Ziolkowski.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH
DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND DHS UNVEIL INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE SECURITY AND VISA PROCESSING

The Secretaries of State and Homeland Security announced a new initiative January 17 aimed at improving the U.S. visa processing and visitor security systems. The goal is to enhance border security and demonstrates to visitors—including students and scholars—that the U.S. is a welcoming nation. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff issued a joint statement, “Securing Borders and Open Doors in the Information Age,” that, in part, aims to speed visa application processing, expand the time that visiting students and scholars may be issued visas before they arrive in the U.S., and create an advisory board for U.S. travel policies.

The announcement came less than two weeks after the University Presidents Summit on International Education, organized by the Departments of State and Education, during which President Bush announced a new national security language initiative and emphasized the importance of welcoming foreign students and scholars to America’s colleges and universities (see CFR Weekly Wrap-up, 1-6-06).

The State/HomeLand Security statement highlights several changes in visa processing for foreign visitors. For example, the Department of State plans to begin a pilot project using digital videoconferencing technology for applicant interviews. This would allow visa applicants to submit applications to one of several U.S. diplomatic posts in their country, rather than to just one or two. The goal is to reduce bottlenecks in the processing of visas.

As a way to encourage foreign students and scholars to study in the U.S., State and the Department of Homeland Security will expand the length of time foreign students may be issued student visas and arrive in the United States before their academic study. “Student visas will be issued up to 120 days (as compared to 90 days under current regulations) and allow entry 45 days (compared to 30 days currently) in advance of studies,” according to the announcement.

The two departments also will create an advisory board of representatives from the travel industry, business community, and academia to identify best practices for the development of U.S. travel policies. The advisory board will be asked to “provide feedback on specific initiatives and serve as a reliable sounding board for innovative travel facilitations and security-related programs.”

Additional information about the statement is available on the State Department Web site at: http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/59242.htm.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL AID TO HURRICANE-AFFECTED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced January 18 that colleges and universities affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita would receive $230 million in aid—$30 million more than the amount appropriated by Congress. According to a Department press release, the extra
$30 million is from “unspent federal financial aid funding.” Following a meeting Wednesday with eight New Orleans-area colleges and universities, Secretary Spellings said the extra funds would be available to affected institutions in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and to colleges and universities around the country that took in displaced students.


The original $200 million in aid was contained in the FY06 Defense Appropriations bill (H.R. 2863). It included $95 million each for the higher education boards of Louisiana and Mississippi and $10 million for institutions around the country that accepted displaced students.

DOE OFFICE OF SCIENCE PUBLISHES BROCHURE ON UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

The Office of Science at the Department of Energy has published *Maintaining U.S. Preeminence in Science: University Support*, a 14-page brochure that details the Office of Science’s role in research and education at the nation’s colleges and universities. The document, commissioned by Office of Science Director Raymond L. Orbach, includes a state-by-state breakdown of the Office’s spending at colleges and universities, as well as summaries of the Office’s major research and education programs and the numbers of researchers, graduate students, and others they help support.


DAVID DUNN APPOINTED ACTING UNDER SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

President Bush has appointed David Dunn as Acting Under Secretary of Education. For the past year, Mr. Dunn has served as chief of staff to Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. According to a Department press release, his duties “will include overseeing policies, programs, and activities regarding vocational and adult education, postsecondary education, college aid, and the President's financial reforms for the Pell Grant program.”

Before joining the Department of Education, Mr. Dunn was Special Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy at the White House Domestic Policy Council. Earlier, he served as Associate Executive Director of the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), where he was the association's chief lobbyist and expert on school finance and school accountability. He also worked 15 years for the State of Texas, serving as lead staff for an education policy center that developed the blueprint for Texas' School Accountability System in the early 1990's.

Mr. Dunn earned a bachelor’s degree in political science at Baylor University and a master’s degree in government at the University of Texas at Austin.

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