The Senate was in session today to continue consideration of the nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court and will also be in session Monday, January 30. The House has been out of session since late December and will return on Tuesday, January 31.

When the House reconvenes next week, the chamber is expected to vote again on the budget reconciliation package (S. 1932), which was held over from last year after the Senate approved the bill but changed it slightly after the House had adjourned. CongressDaily reports that the bill, approved in December by a 212-206 margin, is expected to pass again by a similarly narrow margin. At least one Republican who supported the package in December, Rep. Rob Simmons (R-CT), said Wednesday he will now oppose it.

Also on the agenda for February will be some type of lobbying overhaul and extension of the USA PATRIOT Act (H.R. 3199). On the latter measure, when House and Senate negotiators were unable to reach agreement on the extension before the holiday recess, so the two chambers approved a five-week extension of expiring provisions, which lasts through February 3. This morning’s Wall Street Journal predicts that House Republicans will pass a one-month extension of the bill before turning to their leadership elections.

For the Senate, work will begin Monday with a cloture vote on the Supreme Court nomination of Samuel Alito. If cloture is invoked—and press reports indicate that a last-minute effort by some Democrats to filibuster the nomination is likely to fail—the vote will take place on Tuesday. The Senate also is expected to approve the non-controversial nomination of Ben Bernanke to 
replace Alan Greenspan as chairman of the Federal Reserve. The chamber also is expected to take action on the USA Patriot Act and may consider a motion to send the tax reconciliation bill to conference.

**BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS**

**ELECTION-YEAR LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR LIKELY TO SQUEEZE APPROPRIATIONS WORK NEW**

In this election year, Congress faces a shortened legislative calendar that will leave relatively little time to complete the FY07 appropriations bills. *CongressDaily* reports that there are only 60 days devoted to legislative business between now and the October 6 target adjournment date for both chambers.

*Technology Daily* reports that Congress this session will give top priority to homeland security issues, with funding increases expected in areas such as technology to defend against weapons of mass destruction and border security. At a recent forum, G. William Hoagland, the senior budget advisor to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), said that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may be the only federal entity that will see its budget increase in FY07. "It is about the only budget in town that is going to continue to see growth coming into the next year," he said, predicting an increase of as much as five percent.

**SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING REQUESTS EXPECTED NEXT MONTH NEW**

*CongressDaily* reports that as early as late February, the Administration could transmit its requests for FY06 supplemental funding for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, foreign aid, and post-hurricane relief. The House and Senate Appropriations committees hope to act on the requests before the end of April, when funding for the Defense Department and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are expected to run low.

The publication says that the Pentagon is spending about $7 billion a month, meaning Congress would have to provide another $50 billion, on top of the sum already appropriated for FY06, just to ensure that funding lasts through the end of the calendar year. FEMA is expected to request another $20 billion in supplemental funding on top of the $60 billion already appropriated for Gulf Coast relief and rebuilding.

**OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

**SENATORS INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO BOOST U.S. COMPETITIVENESS**

A bipartisan group of four Senators introduced a package of three bills on January 25 aimed at bolstering the nation’s competitiveness, in part by authorizing significant increases in federal funding for the physical sciences and engineering research and education. The package, termed “Protecting America’s Competitive Edge (PACE),” is based largely on the recommendations of the National Academies’ recent report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm” (See item on AAU report below.). It was introduced by Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD).
Among other provisions, the package would authorize 10-percent annual funding increases in basic research at the Departments of Energy (DOE) and Defense, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and NASA, and create and expand a variety of science education programs at DOE and NSF. Other provisions include a proposal to create a new student visa for doctoral candidates in the physical sciences and engineering, and a Sense of the Senate statement supporting the National Academies’ recommendation to retain the basic research exemption in deemed export controls.

A press release on the package of bills is available on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Web site at:  

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

PRESIDENT EXPECTED TO MAKE ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS A THEME OF HIS STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS NEW

U.S. economic competitiveness is expected to be a topic of discussion in President Bush’s State of the Union address on January 31. The President essentially confirmed several press reports to this effect when he said at his January 26 press conference, “We live in a competitive world, and so policies must be put in place to recognize the competition of the global economy and prepare our people to be able to continue to compete so America can continue to lead.” But press reports also caution that budget realities may limit the funds that the President requests for a competitiveness initiative. CongressDaily says that the President is expected to submit an FY07 budget that calls for cuts in non-security discretionary spending. If that is the case, proposed budget increases can be expected to feature trade-offs among existing activities and programs.

The New York Times reports that the speech is expected to focus on several topics, including “health care, spending restraint, illegal immigration and the nation’s international economic competitiveness, as well as an unapologetic restatement of his national security policy.” CQToday reports that in a January 19 speech, President Bush outlined the energy agenda he is likely to discuss in the State of the Union address, including endorsing clean coal technology, research and development of alternative fuels made from farm products, and promoting a new generation of nuclear power plans.

STATE DEPARTMENT CLARIFIES WHEN F1/M1 STUDENT VISAS CAN BECOME INVALID

The Department of State has clarified that an international student’s F-1 or M-1 visa becomes invalid if the student transfers to another school or program or returns home for a visit and does not resume studies within five months.

The clarification, which was sent as a cable to all diplomatic and consular affairs posts in December 2005, says that “an individual admitted in F-1/M-1 status to study in the U.S. who is transferring between schools or programs is no longer regarded to be in student status if classes are not resumed within five months of the date of transferring out of the previous school or within five months of the date of program completion, whichever is applicable.” Moreover, a
student enrolled in the U.S. who takes a break from studies to return home for a semester or longer (five months or longer) will be deemed out-of-status, and thus his/her F-1/M-1 visa will be invalidated. It is important to note that no formal loss-of-status notification needs to be made for a student to lose his/her student status.

In order to be restored to student status, the student must apply for a reinstatement of student status with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. “If student status is restored, then the student’s F-1/M-1 visa remains valid (assuming that the visa has not expired). However, if the student is denied reinstatement, then the student is held to have lost F-1/M-1 status at that point.” Since the student is considered to be out-of-status from the time the reinstatement is denied, the student must immediately leave the country.

A copy of the cable is available on the Department of State Web site at http://travel.state.gov/visa/laws/telegrams/telegrams_2780.html.

OTHER

AAU ANNOUNCES NATIONAL DEFENSE EDUCATION AND INNOVATION INITIATIVE  UPDATED

AAU on January 26 released a report calling for a national education and innovation initiative “aimed at meeting the economic and security challenges we will face over the next half-century.” The report features a broad set of recommendations for policy changes and investments, largely by universities and the federal government, designed to strengthen the nation’s capacity to conduct basic, university-based research; cultivate U.S. talent in the sciences, engineering, mathematics, and foreign languages & cultures; and continue to attract and retain the best talent from around the world.

The AAU report is intended to complement the reports on strengthening U.S. competitiveness that have been issued over the past year by business and academic organizations, particularly the National Academies’ “Rising Above the Gathering Storm.” In reference to those publications, AAU President Nils Hasselmo said, “We have included some of their recommendations among our own, but one very important element that we are contributing to the discussion is specific recommendations for the higher education community, and particularly research universities.”

The full report is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/reports/NDEII.pdf.


A list of reports, activities, and books on U.S. competitiveness is available at: http://www.aau.edu/research/CompetitivenessDOCS.pdf.

CFR ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN 2006 HUMANITIES ADVOCACY DAY

As previously reported, the annual Humanities Advocacy Day will be held March 1-2, 2006, at the City Center Hotel in Washington, D.C. CFR members are encouraged to attend this event with interested faculty members from their campuses and to coordinate congressional visits, where possible, with their state humanities councils.
On-line registration is available at: www.nhalliance.org/had. The deadline for registration is Wednesday, February 8th; those who need a hotel room reservation should call the City Center Hotel by Monday, January 30th in order to secure a room at the conference rate.

The tentative schedule for the event includes a legislative and policy briefing and a Capitol Hill reception on March 1 featuring exhibits of research projects funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Congressional visits will be conducted the following day.

While several AAU campuses have nominated NEH-funded projects for display at the March 1 reception, additional projects would be welcome. Projects may be presented through computer displays, books, manuscripts, archaeological artifacts, or other means. A potential exhibit should be geared toward a lay audience, not faculty members or scholars. Those interested in nominating a project should contact Mollie Benz of the AAU staff at mollie_benz@aau.edu.

Humanities Advocacy Day is an annual event organized by the National Humanities Alliance, a non-profit coalition founded in 1981 to advance humanities policy. AAU is a co-sponsor of the event.

CAROL SCHEMAN JOINS UNIFORMED SERVICES UNIVERSITY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES

Carol Scheman has been appointed Vice President for Communications at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Maryland. She previously served as Vice President for Communications and Government Relations at the University of Pennsylvania. Earlier in her career, Ms. Scheman served as Deputy Commissioner for Public Affairs at the Food and Drug Administration and Director of Federal Relations at AAU.

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences was established by Congress in 1972 under the Department of Defense (DOD) to provide career physicians for DOD and the U.S. Public Health Service.

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