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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

Congress has been out of session this week for the Presidents’ Day recess. The Senate will return on Monday, February 27 to resume consideration of the reauthorization of the USA Patriot Act (S. 2271). No roll call votes will be held on Monday. The House will return on Tuesday, February 28, when it is likely to vote on a motion to go to conference on the pension overhaul bill (H.R. 2830, S. 1783).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

FY07 BUDGET PROCESS WILL BE DIFFICULT  NEW

CQToday reports that this year’s budget process will be complicated by several factors, in particular the Administration’s proposed election-year cuts in non-homeland security domestic discretionary spending. Former Senate Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-NM) said, “I think it’s one of the more doubtful years for getting the budget passed in years.”

With the President proposing an absolute cut in discretionary spending outside of defense and homeland security for the second straight year, appropriators are “looking to the House and Senate Budget panels for relief,” says the publication. Facing a proposed $4 billion cut in labor,
health, and education spending, House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ralph Regula (R-OH) told the House Budget Committee last week:

“Last year, we made many difficult choices, cutting the bill by $1.6 billion and eliminating 29 programs. The Administration's FY2007 budget proposes to further reduce the spending on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education by nearly $4 billion. As you consider the budget, I strongly urge you to be mindful of the considerable impact the programs in this bill have on Americans.”


Separately, Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), chairman of the House Science, State, Justice and Commerce Appropriations Subcommittee, told Science magazine that the President’s proposed funding increases for the National Science Foundation and core programs at the National Institute for Standards and Technology in FY07 would be funded. Both agencies “will get their number,” he told the publication.

The House and Senate Budget committees will mark up their respective budget resolutions in March, with the goal of adopting the conference report by the deadline of April 15. (See item below on AAU letter to House and Senate Budget Committee leaders.)

**APPRIOTORS TO BEGIN WORK ON FY06 SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING REQUESTS**

Before House and Senate appropriators begin work on the FY07 appropriations bills, they will consider the President’s two FY06 supplemental funding requests: the $72.4 billion request for defense and foreign aid and the $19.8 billion request for hurricane relief. The House Appropriations Committee plans to mark up the requests as one bill next week, with House floor action expected the following week. CQToday reports that Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Thad Cochran (R-MS) hopes to complete Senate action on the package before the Memorial Day recess.

**TAX RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE EXPECTED NEXT WEEK**

Reports indicate that the House-Senate conference on the tax reconciliation bill (H.R. 4297, S. 2020) could convene as early as next week. The Senate version of the measure includes several provisions of interest to the higher education community.

Under the leadership of the American Council on Education (ACE) and the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), the higher education community will send conferees a letter about conference issues.

The higher education community supports the inclusion in S. 2020 of tax-free distributions from Individual Retirement Accounts for charitable purposes and the extension of the deduction for qualified higher education expenses, including tuition.

However, there remain a number of provisions in the Senate bill that are of concern, including proposals affecting donor advised funds, supporting organizations, and reporting procedures for unrelated business income.
EXECUTIVE BRANCH

EDUCATION COMMISION TO HOLD IT THIRD PUBLIC MEETING IN BOSTON

NEW

The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education will hold its third public meeting on March 20, 2006, in Boston. The commission, which is focusing on accessibility, affordability, accountability, and quality issues, expects to submit a final report to Secretary Margaret Spellings by August 2006. The committee’s two previous field meetings were held in San Diego on February 2-3 and in Seattle on February 7.

Additional information about the commission, including materials from the first two public meetings, is available at: http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html.

STATE DEPARTMENT WILL ISSUE VISAS TO STUDENTS UP TO 120 DAYS BEFORE THEIR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS BEGIN

The State Department announced February 14 that it would lengthen the maximum period between issuing a student visa and the start date of the student’s academic program from 90 days to 120 days. The extension will apply only to students applying for initial-entry F-1, F-2, and M-1 and M-2 visas. A Department press release says that J-1 and J-2 visa applicants may have their visa issued at any time prior to starting their program. The regulations for students who already hold F or M visas will remain the same. Students who have already been issued these visas and who are continuing their education may apply for new F or M visas at any time as long as they have maintained their status as a student and their SEVIS records are current.


OTHER

AAU URGES HOUSE AND SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEES TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

NEW

AAU President Nils Hasselmo urged the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Budget Committees this week to “make a significant new contribution to the nation’s long-term economic competitiveness and security by increasing federal investments in basic research and higher education programs in the FY07 Congressional Budget Resolution.”

In a February 23 letter, Hasselmo endorsed the President’s request for increased funding for the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy Office of Science but noted that increased investments in the National Institutes of Health, Department of Defense basic research, NASA, and student aid in the Department of Education are “also critical to our nation’s system of innovation.”

A copy of the letter is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/Ltr_to_ChmnGregg_22306.pdf.
MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM NAS FORUM ON TITLE VI PROGRAMS

An expert panel of the National Academies of Science reviewing Title VI and Fulbright-Hayes international programs at the Department of Education has made available statements and related materials from the group’s first public forum, held February 14. Included among the materials is the written statement provided by William Brustein, Director of the University Center for International Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, who represented the Coalition for International Education, of which AAU is a member.

The materials are available at: http://www7.nationalacademies.org/cfe/TitleVI_Fullbright_Hays_Meeting_1_Agenda.html

The Academies’ review is sponsored by the Department of Education and was requested by Congress in the FY05 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations measure. Its purpose is to “review the adequacy and effectiveness of [the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays] programs in addressing their statutory missions and in building the nation’s international and foreign language expertise—particularly as needed for economic, foreign affairs, and national security purposes.” The NAS committee expects to complete its report by the summer of 2007.

The next public forum for the panel will be May 18, but the agenda and format have not been made public.

2006 HUMANITIES ADVOCACY DAY SET FOR MARCH 1-2

As previously reported, the annual Humanities Advocacy Day will be held next Wednesday and Thursday, March 1-2, in Washington, D.C. The schedule for March 1 will include a legislative and policy briefing, followed by a Capitol Hill reception that evening. The next day, March 2, will be devoted to visits to congressional offices.

The Wednesday evening reception on Capitol Hill will feature exhibits of research projects funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Several AAU institutions are participating.

Those members of the CFR who have not yet scheduled congressional visits and would like assistance in doing so are asked to contact Mollie Benz Flounlacker 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. Additional information is available at: http://www.nhalliance.org/had/2006/sourcebook.

TWO GROUPS PREPARE TO OPPOSE STUDENT AID CUTS  UPDATED

Two organizations are gearing up to oppose cuts in student aid programs proposed in the Administration’s FY07 budget.

The Coalition of Higher Education Assistance Organizations (COHEAO) has launched a grassroots effort to save the Perkins loan program. The President’s FY07 budget proposes both to eliminate the program and to recall the federal portion of revolving funds held by participating
institutions. The COHEAO Grassroots Action Network is urging its members to write to Members of Congress to request their support for funding the program’s federal capital contributions at $100 million and the loan cancellation account at $120 million. Additional details on COHEAO’s advocacy efforts are available at: http://www.coheao.org/memberframegrassroots.html.

The National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) has issued a press release opposing the proposed student aid cuts and urging its members to voice their concerns to legislators. The group is focusing on the proposed elimination of the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program, which leverages federal funds with a state match to provide grant aid to low-income students, and the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program (GEAR-UP), which helps prepare low-income high school students for college. The press release and related materials are available on the association’s Web site at: http://nassgap.org/viewrepository.aspx?categoryID=238#.

AAU’s summary of the Administration’s FY07 budget for Department of Education student aid programs, including the Perkins loan, LEAP, and GEAR-UP programs, is available at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/07EdOverview.pdf.

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