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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House and Senate have been out of session this week for the St. Patrick’s Day recess. The Senate will reconvene on Monday, March 27, and the House on Tuesday, March 28. Both chambers face two weeks of heavy legislative work before the two-week Easter recess begins April 10.

When the Senate returns on Monday, the chamber will resume consideration of lobbying reform legislation (S. 2349), which Senate Rules Committee Chairman Trent Lott (R-MS), manager of the bill, hopes to finish up later that evening. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) plans to begin consideration of immigration and border security legislation (S. 2454) the following day (see item below).

The House next week is expected to consider the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (H.R. 609) (see item below). A lobbying and ethics overhaul package and the FY07 budget resolution are tentatively scheduled for the following week. The House may also take up the conference report on pension reform legislation if the report is completed before the break. The lobbying package was introduced March 16 by House Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier (R-CA) and will go through regular committee review before floor action. CongressDaily reports that the House is likely to vote on at least part of the ethics package before the Easter recess.
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE MEMBERS INITIATE EFFORTS TO INCLUDE SPECTER/HARKIN AMENDMENT IN HOUSE BUDGET RESOLUTION  UPDATED

Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE) plans to announce on Tuesday that he and a group of moderate House Republicans will vote against the rule on the House FY07 budget resolution unless it allows for an up-or-down floor vote on the Specter/Harkin amendment to increase funding for education and health programs.

Rep. Castle is planning a rally to announce this position on Tuesday, March 28, at 10:00 a.m. EST in Room HC-5 in the U.S. Capitol.

Meanwhile, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) had said she plans to offer the Specter-Harkin amendment during the House Budget Committee’s consideration of the FY07 budget resolution next Wednesday, March 29.

As reported late last week, 23 House Republican moderates led by Reps. Nancy Johnson (R-CT) and Fred Upton (R-MI) wrote to House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) urging that the FY07 budget resolution include “a modest 2 percent increase in non-security, non-emergency discretionary appropriations over Fiscal Year 2006.” The letter expressed “strong reservations” about “voting for any budget that would result in real cuts in a number of programs.”

The Senate approved the Specter/Harkin amendment to the FY07 budget resolution on March 16 by a vote of 73 to 27. The amendment added $7 billion above the Senate Budget Committee-approved levels for health, education, and labor programs. The amendment did not raise the FY07 discretionary spending cap but instead increased the advance funding limit in FY08.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

HOUSE TO TAKE UP HEA REAUTHORIZATION BILL  NEW

The House is expected to consider legislation next week to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA). The version of the College Access and Opportunity Act (H.R. 609) slated for the House floor does not include student loan and other elements of the HEA that were reauthorized as part of the Deficit Reduction Act signed into law last month (See CFR Weekly Wrap-up, 02-03-06). House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA) reportedly will offer a manager’s amendment when H.R. 609 is considered, but the contents of the amendment are not yet available.

The bill, however, remains troublesome because it contains provisions that would break from the tradition of academic autonomy by intruding upon the fundamental academic activities of universities and dictating costly and burdensome new requirements. (See CFR Alert, 03-24-06).

The measure retains intrusive college cost accountability provisions to which AAU and the higher education community have objected since they were first introduced three years ago. These provisions would establish a college affordability index based on the Consumer Price Index, impose burdensome and inappropriate reporting requirements, and create a
series of punitive measures for institutions whose rate of tuition increase exceeds the index, including an audit by the Inspector General of the Department of Education.

Members of AAU's CFR Higher Education Task Force have met with several congressional staff members this week to articulate concerns about the bill, and AAU staff and the task force are closely monitoring the measure. AAU also continues to work with the American Council on Education and other higher education associations to advocate for improvements to the bill.

**SENATE CONTINUES WORK ON IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION**  
*UPDATED*

On Monday, the Senate Judiciary Committee will continue its mark-up of Committee Chairman Arlen Specter’s (R-PA) comprehensive immigration legislation (no bill number), even as Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) is planning floor consideration of his own immigration bill (S. 2454) the following day. Earlier this year, Senator Frist set a deadline of March 27 for initiating floor consideration of immigration legislation as a means of forcing action on a bill. Although the Judiciary Committee has met five times this year to mark up the Specter bill, progress remains slow over such issues as a guest worker program and amnesty for illegal immigrants. *Congress Daily* reports that Senator Frist will begin consideration of his bill—which focuses on border security and does not include guest worker or amnesty provisions—with the understanding that if the Judiciary Committee is able to finish its work with a majority of Republican support, that package would be brought to the floor.

During the Judiciary Committee’s mark-up the week of March 13, it appeared that the committee might consider amendments of concern to the higher education and research communities to be offered by Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) (*CFR Alert 03-15-06*). However, the Senators’ amendments were not considered during the March 16 committee session, and further work on the bill was postponed until March 27.

Senator Grassley is expected to propose an amendment that would eliminate the H-1B visa cap exemption for academia—created in 2000—and an amendment that would raise the overall cap for H-1B visas from 65,000 to 200,000. An increase in the overall H-1B cap would not benefit the higher education or business communities if existing exemptions were eliminated.

Senator Feinstein is expected to introduce several amendments that would strike from the chairman’s mark language concerning students, student visas, and employment-based visas. One amendment of concern would strike the proposed exemption of advanced-degree science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates from the employment-based visa limit.

*CQToday* reports that Senator Frist plans to spend two weeks on immigration legislation. If a bill is approved, the measure will be conferenced with a narrower bill (H.R. 4437) approved by the House last December. That measure focuses on border enforcement and contains no guest worker provisions.
OTHER

HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS WRITE SECRETARIES RICE AND SPELLINGS ABOUT INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

The six national presidential higher education associations, including AAU, wrote to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Education Secretary Margaret Spellings on March 21 to thank them for the national presidents’ summit on international education they convened in December and to delineate seven major components of a comprehensive international education initiative.

A copy of the associations’ letter is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/education/Ltr_Rice_PresSumm_32106.pdf.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN CREATES EDUCATIONAL WEB SITE ON STEM CELL RESEARCH  NEW

The University of Michigan has created a new Web site on stem cell research that is intended to be a complete, accurate account of stem cell science. The site includes a collection of educational materials and resources, as well as an animated Flash tutorial.

The site is available at: http://lifesciences.umich.edu/.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY NAMES MARK BURNHAM NEW HEAD OF FEDERAL RELATIONS  NEW

Michigan State University has named Mark Burnham as its new associate vice president for governmental relations. He succeeds Howard Gobstein, who is now a vice president at the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. Burnham currently serves as the director of federal relations for research and assistant director of the University of Michigan Washington, D.C. office. He received a bachelor’s degree in political science from the University of Michigan and a law degree from Boston College.

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