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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate will return from the two-week spring recess on Monday, April 24; the House will return on Tuesday, April 25.

When the Senate reconvenes, the chamber is expected to spend the entire week debating the $106.5 billion FY06 supplemental funding bill. Fiscal conservatives have expressed objections to the measure’s price tag, which is $15 billion above the President’s request and the House-passed bill. Over the next several weeks, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) has indicated that he would like to revisit the immigration bill and bring up the tax reconciliation package if agreement is reached in the House-Senate conference. The first week of May will be “health-care week,” featuring legislation to foster small-business health plans and limit medical malpractice awards.

The House is expected to take up a lobbying and ethics reform package next week. CongressDaily reports that the measure includes increased disclosure by lobbyists, a suspension of all privately funded travel until December 15—by which time the Ethics Committee is expected to have developed a plan for modifying gift and travel rules—greater transparency on earmarks, mandatory ethics training for congressional staff, and an end to pension benefits for Members who commit certain felonies related to their official duties. The first week of May is likely to see consideration of telecommunications legislation, reports the Washington Post, followed the next week by the defense authorization bill.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE BUDGET RESOLUTION REMAINS A QUESTION  NEW

What is not yet on the House schedule is a vote on the FY07 budget resolution. CQToday reports that House Republican leaders hope to work out a budget deal among appropriators,
moderates, and conservatives next week, with the goal of approving a package the week of May 1.

The publication reports that if an FY07 budget resolution cannot be approved this year, congressional leaders can propose a resolution that “deems” the discretionary spending cap to be set at the President’s proposed level of $873 billion and attach the measure to the first FY07 appropriations bill. Appropriations Committee spokesman John Scofield told CQToday, “We can deliver 11, 12 bills through the House by July 4.” He added, “We’ve got a schedule, subcommittees are working…It’s not going to be easy, just like last year.”

As reported previously (CFR Weekly Wrap-up, 04-07-06), House Republican leaders were forced to abandon efforts to approve the budget resolution before the spring recess after they were unable to reach agreement among the three key Republican factions. A threat by Republican appropriators to join Democrats in voting against the measure prevented the leadership from bringing it to the floor. House conservatives wanted new rules cracking down on earmarks and restrictions on non-defense emergency spending. They also said that House Appropriations Committee Chairman Jerry Lewis (R-CA) was too willing to make concessions to the moderates, who wanted increased funding for domestic programs.

Chairman Lewis argued that his committee already had reduced the number of earmarks and that allowing earmarks to be challenged on the floor would create a game of “ping-pong” between the House and Senate, delaying important spending bills. He also opposed the proposal to require any non-defense emergency spending above $4.3 billion to be approved first by the Budget Committee.

Moderate House Republicans wanted Chairman Lewis to shift $7 billion from defense, homeland security, and foreign aid into domestic programs such as education and health, but he was unwilling to move more than $3 billion from defense. That was not enough to sway the moderates. Columnist Robert Novak said in his Washington Post column yesterday that Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE), a leader of the House Republican moderates on the budget, had agreed to the budget plan before Chairman Lewis stymied the deal. Rep. Castle’s office says that is not true and that the Congressman has not agreed to any deal.

OTHER

COALITION URGES APPROPRIATORS TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Coalition for International Education, of which AAU is a member, sent a memorandum to members of the House and Senate Labor-HHS-Education appropriations subcommittees on April 18 urging increased funding in FY07 for international education and foreign language studies programs in the Department of Education. Specifically, the coalition memorandum requests $114.2 million—an increase of $8.2 million, or eight percent, above FY06—for the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs. It also requests added funding for the international consortia programs in the Department’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

Additionally, the memorandum applauds the increased attention to foreign language education in the President’s National Security Language Initiative. It offers several recommendations for implementing proposed new activities and programs in the Department of Education using existing Title VI and Fulbright-Hays expertise and educational materials.
YALE ANNOUNCES NEW MEMBER OF FEDERAL RELATIONS OFFICE  NEW

Kara Haas will join Yale University’s Office of Federal Relations, effective April 24. She will be based on campus. Ms. Haas has worked most recently with the majority staff of the House Science Committee, where she has been responsible for math and science education and visa issues. Previously, she served in the offices of Rep. Michael Castle (R-DE) and former Rep. James Greenwood (R-PA).

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