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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The House is adjourned for the year, subject to the call of the chair. The Senate is in pro forma session—to keep the President from making recess appointments—and plans to return to session on November 17 for a lame-duck session. House leaders have not said if the House will also return for a lame-duck session after the November elections.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SECOND STIMULUS PACKAGE REMAINS A POSSIBILITY  NEW

House Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) expect Congress to consider a second economic stimulus package after the November elections to supplement the tax-rebate package enacted earlier this year. But it remains unclear how large the second stimulus package will be and whether the two leaders will seek to move it in November or wait until January with a new Administration and Congress.

Senate leaders are already planning a post-election session beginning November 17. Although Speaker Pelosi has not committed to holding a lame-duck session in the House, CongressDaily reports that House Democratic leaders “appear to be moving toward bringing a $100 billion economic stimulus package to the floor during a lame-duck session the week of Nov. 17,” but notes that “details and timing are being worked out.”

Such a package—which would be less than the $150-billion package that has been discussed previously—is expected to focus on raising federal matching funds for state Medicaid programs, expanding food stamps, providing another extension of unemployment benefits, and providing new money for infrastructure projects. CongressDaily reports that infrastructure spending under the plan would focus on alternative energy projects, the national electricity grid, expanding broadband Internet access, and creating “green” jobs. Business representatives hope to add assistance to small businesses and the auto industry.
Democratic leaders have not publicly indicated whether they will consider adding funding for research and innovation at the science agencies, as the Senate did in the stimulus bill it considered in September.

The White House and congressional Republicans have opposed a large stimulus package and successfully blocked approval of the Senate bill last month. News reports this week have indicated that President Bush might consider supporting a stimulus package if Congress agrees to consider another Administration priority, the Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Moreover, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke told the House Budget Committee on October 20 that, “with the economy likely to be weak for several quarters, and with some risk of a protracted slowdown, consideration of a fiscal package by the Congress at this juncture seems appropriate.” (Mr. Bernanke did not specify the size or composition of such a package.)

As CQToday noted two weeks ago, “lame-duck sessions are rarely productive and it may be a leap to expect Republicans to reverse their opposition to the type of plan Democrats have been touting, particularly if the GOP loses a large number of seats [in the election].”

In September, the House passed a $60.8-billlion stimulus bill (H.R. 7110) focused on added funding for infrastructure projects, food stamps, and Medicaid, and an extension of unemployment benefits. The Senate considered a bill (S. 3604) that, as noted above, also included additional funding for science. The House measure passed by a vote of 263 to 158, but the Senate bill failed to secure the 60 votes needed for approval. President Bush threatened to veto either bill.

OTHER

COLLEGE BOARD RELEASES 2008 COLLEGE PRICING AND STUDENT AID REPORTS

The College Board on October 29 released its 2008 reviews of college pricing and student financial aid, concluding that “college prices in 2008-09 rose just slightly faster than the Consumer Price Index (CPI). While more financial aid is available for students than ever before, the number of private loans for higher education began to shrink even before the current credit crisis.”

According to the College Board’s report on trends in college pricing, published tuition and fees for in-state students at public four-year institutions rose by an average of $394, or 6.4 percent, to $6,585 in 2008-09. Average total published charges for those students, including tuition and fees and room and board, rose by 5.7 percent to $14,333. Published tuition and fees at private four-year institutions increased an average $1,398, or 5.9 percent, to $25,143 in 2008-09. Average total published charges for those students rose by 5.6 percent to $34,132. The CPI rose by 5.6 percent over the same period.

According to the College Board’s report on trends in student aid, financial aid—both grant aid and federal loans—increased in 2007-08 by a per-student average of 5.5 percent after adjusting for inflation, to a total of $162.5 billion. Within the total, preliminary data show that federal grant aid increased over the previous year by $1.5 billion, or 7.6 percent, to $20.9 billion. Institutional grants increased over the previous year by $2.3 billion, or 8.4 percent, to $29.1 billion.
The report also shows that, while federal loan volume increased by 6.4 percent to $66.8 billion, private loan volume declined by about one percent to $19.1 billion in 2007 dollars. It is important to note that this information was reported before the current credit crunch, which has created new concerns about students’ ability to find private loans.

Total spending for Pell Grants increased by $1.3 billion to $14.4 billion in 2007-08, an increase of 9.6 percent. After holding steady for two years, the number of Pell Grant recipients rose by 5.1 percent to 5.4 million. The average grant increased by about $100 to $2,649.

The College Board also issued a supplemental report on the economic and social benefits of higher education titled, “Education Pays.” Additional materials are included on the College Board website.

NEARLY 180 GROUPS URGE NEXT PRESIDENT TO DESIGNATE A SCIENCE ADVISOR EARLY  NEW

A broad coalition of 178 universities, trade associations, businesses, and science, engineering, technology, and mathematical organizations has sent letters to both presidential candidates urging them to appoint a Science Advisor by January 20 and elevate the position to Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and assign it cabinet rank.

The October 30 letter, led by AAU and the American Association for the Advancement of Science as part of their joint Campaign 2008 activities, notes that long-term solutions to many of the nation’s greatest challenges—healthcare reform, energy, and global climate change—will be impossible without groundbreaking scientific and technological advances. The letter continues, “Putting a science advisor in place early, and providing the individual with adequate stature and authority within the White House, will help the new President effectively address the challenges we face.”

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