Although Congress will reconvene next week for a lame-duck session to consider financial help for the struggling domestic auto industry and possibly a second economic stimulus package, it appears unlikely that the legislation will be approved. Both the Administration and congressional Republicans continue to oppose the Democrats’ proposals and Democrats have the option of waiting until January to move legislation with a new Administration and a new Congress. Also next week, Democrats and Republicans in both chambers will welcome new Members and hold leadership elections for the 111th Congress.

Senate Democratic leaders plan to begin debate Monday on a $25-billion aid package for the auto industry, with a final vote expected on Wednesday. The package, which may simply carve out funding from the $700 billion bailout for the financial industry, would be attached to an extension of unemployment benefits which was approved by the House in October. On the economic stimulus package, CongressDaily reports that it is not clear if a measure will actually be brought to a vote.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) announced today that the House will be in session on Wednesday, November 19. However, as noted by CQToday, House leaders “have been clear that progress on auto aid or a broader economic stimulus package will have to come in the Senate first, where Republican members have the ability to block any legislation.” The House apparently will not vote on such a package unless the Senate approves one first.
AAU ASKS CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS TO CONSIDER UNIVERSITIES’ ROLE IN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

AAU wrote to leaders of the House and Senate on November 12 asking that as they develop economic stimulus legislation and complete the FY09 appropriations bills, they consider the role that research universities should play in economic recovery. “We cannot forecast how long the current economic downturn will last,” said the letter, “but we can be sure that investments made in education and research today will stimulate the economy now and strengthen economic competitiveness and national security in the future.”

The letter said that such investments could include additional aid to help students to attend or remain in college—such as raising the borrowing limit on federal student loans and increasing the Pell Grant maximum award—as well as added funding for university research infrastructure that would help lay the foundation for the economic recovery. The latter set of investments could include funding to reduce the backlog of meritorious scientific instrumentation and infrastructure projects and to support additional peer-reviewed scientific research proposals. The federal government might also consider underwriting or otherwise insuring capital for completion of current university construction projects and the initiation of high-priority projects that are planned and ready to go.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

NEH CHAIRMAN WILL STEP DOWN IN JANUARY

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) announced on November 12 that NEH Chairman Bruce Cole will step down from his post in January 2009. Dr. Cole, who has headed NEH for the past seven years, will become the president and CEO of the American Revolution Center, a nonprofit museum that will commemorate the American Revolution.

Dr. Cole is the longest-serving NEH chairman in history, having first been appointed by President Bush and confirmed by the Senate in 2001. He was reconfirmed for a second term in 2005.

AAU is working with the broader humanities community to identify possible candidates for the position.

OTHER

CFR ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN DECEMBER 16 WEBINAR ON INTERNATIONALIZATION

Members of the CFR are encouraged to participate in a webinar developed by the American Council on Education (ACE) titled, “Advancing Internationalization at Research Doctoral Degree Institutions,” which is scheduled for Tuesday, December 16, from 12:00 to 1:15 p.m. ET.

The session, which AAU is cosponsoring, will feature Dr. Madeleine Green of the ACE staff discussing research findings about the internationalization of the curriculum at research universities and how those findings might affect campus practices. Those interested in registering for the webinar, which is part of a series on internationalization in each higher education sector, may do so on the ACE website; the fee is $125.
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