Following two largely unproductive post-election sessions, the House adjourned for the 110th Congress on December 10. The Senate, too, is conducting no legislative business but remains in pro forma session to keep the President from making recess appointments.

During the first lame-duck session the week of November 17, Congress was unable to approve an economic stimulus bill or aid to the domestic auto industry, but it did approve an extension of unemployment benefits. In last week’s session, Congress failed to approve a modified bailout package for domestic automakers after Senate Democrats were unable to overcome Republican opposition to the measure. (President Bush today provided $13.4 billion in short-term loans for Chrysler and General Motors to keep them afloat through the next few months.)

The 111th Congress will convene on Tuesday, January 6. The first order of business will be consideration of a major economic stimulus package that is under development by congressional Democratic leaders and the incoming presidential administration. That will be followed by an omnibus FY09 appropriations package, which is needed to fund federal agencies covered by nine of the 12 FY09 appropriations bills when their stop-gap funding in the continuing resolution runs out on March 6.

The New York Times reports that advisors to President-elect Barack Obama hope to finish developing an economic stimulus proposal by next week so that Democratic congressional staff...
can draft legislative language by early January. The goal is to have the package approved by Congress and ready for the new President to sign shortly after his inauguration on January 20. However, the reported magnitude of the package—$800 billion or more over two years—has prompted concern among both Democratic and Republican legislators which, along with negotiations over its specific provisions, could extend consideration into February. The Washington Post reports that incoming Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) has said there is no agreement yet on the size of the package, and that House Democrats have indicated that a package larger than the $600-billion figure proposed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) could lose votes among the conservative “Blue Dog” Democrats in the House.

Although reports vary about the details, the Times reports that about one-fifth of the developing package could be devoted to health care, with up to $100 billion allocated to help states deal with growing Medicaid costs and another $50 billion to help medical providers move to electronic recordkeeping. Additional billions could support “energy-saving programs, public works projects, school construction and renovation, and expanded jobless aid and food stamps…as well as tax cuts.” Tax cuts for low- and middle-income workers could total about $200 billion, said the Times.

AAU AND OTHER HIGHER EDUCATION GROUPS SUBMIT STIMULUS REQUESTS

AAU and three other groups of higher education institutions have offered specific proposals for inclusion in the several hundred billion-dollar economic stimulus package being developed by the incoming Obama administration and Congressional Democrats.

The proposal developed under the leadership of the American Council on Education (ACE), which AAU has endorsed, focuses on increased student aid and a major new block grant program to the States for academic infrastructure. That proposal also has been endorsed by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges in its own plan released on December 15. A separate proposal developed by a group of public higher education leaders convened by Vartan Gregorian of the Carnegie Corporation of New York also focuses on higher education facilities, primarily but not exclusively at public colleges and universities. The group promoted its plan in two-page advertisements on December 16 in the New York Times and the Washington Post.

The AAU proposal, which is based on discussions at the AAU membership meeting and subsequent consultations with the AAU Executive Committee, emphasizes student grant and loan assistance.

The AAU proposal also addresses academic infrastructure in three ways. It requests a new federal credit mechanism to enable colleges and universities to finish current building projects and begin construction of shovel-ready projects; it cross-references the ACE-led block grant proposal; and it calls for expansion of instrumentation and facilities programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

As a means of promoting talent, employment, and technology advances in priority energy areas, the proposal recommends added funding for the Department of Energy’s new Energy Frontier Research Centers program. And finally, the request calls for developing and expanding programs at NSF and NIH to help nurture the next generation of young faculty scientists and engineers.
AAU Corrects Student Loan Provision in its Request

AAU has corrected an error in its original submission to the Obama transition team regarding student loans. The corrected version now reflects the association’s intent that benefits and protections be increased for ALL federal student loans, not just those administered through the Federal Family Education Loan Program.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DOE REPORT DETAILS IMPORTANCE OF BASIC RESEARCH TO ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Basic Energy Sciences Advisory Committee in the Department of Energy Office of Science has issued a new report, “New Science for A Secure and Sustainable Energy Future,” which outlines the importance of basic research on materials and chemical change in meeting the nation’s energy and environmental challenges. The 13-page report, written for non-scientists, notes that current technologies are insufficient to meet these challenges, and it explains why dramatic scientific breakthroughs are needed to develop whole new ways of producing, storing, and using energy. The report shows the importance of basic research in solving pressing national and international problems.

OTHER

AAU PRESIDENT PARTICIPATES IN SCIENCE ROUNDTABLE WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

AAU President Robert M. Berdahl joined a group of Democratic congressional leaders and leaders in business, science, and education at Princeton University on December 15 for a roundtable discussion of the role of science in improving U.S. innovation and revitalizing the economy.

The “Innovation Agenda” roundtable was organized by Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ), Princeton University President and AAU Chair Shirley Tilghman, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

Among those participating in the roundtable were former Lockheed-Martin CEO Norman Augustine, National Academies of Engineering President Charles M. Vest, Intel Board Chairman Craig Barrett, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute President Shirley Jackson, and Princeton University President Emeritus Harold Shapiro. Other participating members of Congress were Representatives Bart Gordon (D-TN), John Larson (D-CT), Edward Markey (D-MA), and George Miller (D-CA).

Participants expressed strong support for expanding the federal investment in basic scientific research and innovation in order to maintain U.S. scientific leadership and promote economic recovery. Speaker Pelosi said “science” would be the agenda for the new Congress but warned that competition for federal resources would require a strong effort by science advocates in the coming months. She added, “We stand by this [science] as the most important investment that
we can make in health and education and energy independence, job creation and the defense of America.”

End of document