CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House has been in pro forma session today; the Senate has not been in session. Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, March 19, with no recorded votes until Tuesday.

The House next week will consider a contentious $124 billion supplemental emergency spending bill, as well as legislation to allow greater flexibility in spending already-approved hurricane relief monies (H.R. 1227) and a bill to give the District of Columbia a vote in the House and add another House seat for Utah (H.R. 1433).

The Senate will consider a bill on the appointment of U.S. federal prosecutors (S. 214) before turning to the FY08 budget resolution on Wednesday. Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND) told CQToday that he expects debate on the budget measure to require “very long days and nights.”

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES FY08 BUDGET RESOLUTION  

The Senate Budget Committee approved its version of the FY08 budget resolution on March 15 by a party-line vote of 12-11, sending the measure to the full Senate, which is scheduled to consider it next week.

While the committee-approved resolution is not available at this writing, the chairman’s mark proposed by Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND) would add $6.1 billion to education programs above the President’s FY08 request. However, it appears to be silent on funding for major research agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Energy Office of Science. AAU will provide additional information on the measure when it is available.

The chairman’s mark would raise the discretionary spending cap by $18 billion over the President’s proposal, to $948.8 billion, including $2 billion in “advance appropriations.” The chairman’s opening statement says the $18 billion increase is for domestic discretionary spending, which would be $410.7 billion.

AAU has learned from committee staff that the budget resolution assumes none of the higher education program eliminations proposed in the President’s FY08 budget, which include Perkins loans, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants, and the Leveraging Educational Assistance Program. The chairman’s statement says that the mark “recognizes that education is critically important to maintaining our nation’s competitiveness in today’s globalized economy and promoting our long-term economic growth.” Added funding for higher education will “allow for new resources for IDEA, where the Federal government has made promises that we have not kept, No Child Left Behind, again where the Federal government has made promises that we have not kept, and Pell grants.”

UNIVERSITY SCIENTISTS TO ISSUE REPORT ON STATE OF BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH FOLLOWING MARCH 19 SENATE HEARING  

Scientists from several research institutions will hold a press conference March 19 with Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) to release a report detailing how flat funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) threatens scientific and medical progress. The press conference will follow a hearing on the NIH budget in the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee, which Senator Harkin chairs and for which Senator Specter is ranking member. The hearing begins at 1:00 p.m. in 216 Hart Senate Office Building. The press conference will be held in the same room at 3:00 p.m.

The subcommittee hearing will feature NIH Director Elias Zerhouni and a panel of four scientists. The scientists will testify on the impact of the agency’s flat budget on health and on scientific progress. This is the first in a series of subcommittee hearings on NIH, which also will include five subsequent hearings with clusters of institute and center directors—about five at a time.

According to an advisory for the press conference, the scientists’ report will explain how consecutive years of stagnant NIH budgets have halted promising research in mid-stream, challenged the ability of seasoned researchers to sustain scientific progress, prompted young investigators to question their careers in research, and undermined U.S. global leadership in
biomedical research. The group will offer examples of how flat NIH funding could affect advances in treatments for cancer, spinal cord and brain injuries, and Alzheimer’s disease.

Authors of the report include scientists from the University of California system, Columbia University, Harvard University, The Johns Hopkins University, The University of Texas at Austin, Washington University in St. Louis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Yale University, and Partners Healthcare.

SENATORS’ LETTERS URGE INCLUSION OF PELL GRANT INCREASE AND PERKINS LOAN FUNDING IN FY08 BUDGET RESOLUTION

Two bipartisan groups of Senators sent letters to the Senate Budget Committee last Friday asking that the FY08 budget resolution assume a $790 increase in the Pell Grant maximum award and funding for the Perkins Loan program, including renewed funding for capital contributions.

The first letter, signed by 40 Senators, urged the committee to assume an increase in the Pell Grant maximum award of $790, which would bring it to $5,100. The letter is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/Ltr_FY08PellGrant_2007-03-09.pdf.

The second letter, signed by 29 Senators, asks Budget Committee leaders to maintain funding for Perkins Loans at the FY07 level of $65.4 million and restore funding for the Perkins Loan Federal Capital Contribution. The letter is available at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/Ltr_Perkins_Loan_FY08_Budget_03-09-2007.pdf.

HOUSE MEMBERS URGE SUPPORT FOR PERKINS LOANS IN FY08 BUDGET RESOLUTION

A group of 69 Members of the House sent appropriators a letter March 14 urging them to sustain the Perkins Loan program, and specifically to provide $100 million for Perkins capital contributions and retain the Perkins loan cancellation option. The letter is posted on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/Ltr_FY08_Perkins_Loan_2007-03-14.pdf.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE SOLICITS IDEAS ON HEA REAUTHORIZATION

As the House Education and Labor Committee prepares to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA), leaders of the full committee and the higher education subcommittee have sent a letter to "stakeholders" in HEA asking for suggestions to improve the law. The letter from Reps. George Miller (D-CA), Buck McKeon (R-CA), Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX), and Ric Keller (R-FL), invites stakeholders to share their best ideas for addressing both broad issues and specific areas. Specific areas include: closing the gap in student access; improving the financial aid delivery system, including need-based aid; improving college preparation; developing “finance and management models to address escalating college costs,” and increasing “transparency of college costs and the accreditation process for students and their families.” The Education and Labor Committee hopes to mark up a bill in committee by this fall.
Universities are encouraged to submit their views to the committee by the April 13 deadline. AAU is working with the American Council on Education and other higher education associations to provide suggestions before the deadline.

A copy of the committee letter to HEA stakeholders is available at: http://edlabor.house.gov/correspondence/030807HEASTakeholderLetter.pdf.

OTHER

BUSINESS, ACADEMIC LEADERS PRESENT AMERICAN INNOVATION PROCLAMATION TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

A group of corporate and university leaders on March 13 presented a proclamation to Congress signed by more than 270 companies, universities, and associations urging Members to enact a four-part agenda to improve the nation’s international competitiveness. The “American Innovation Proclamation” was made public at a press event with members of the House Science and Technology Committee, led by Committee Chairman Bart Gordon (D-TN). The document calls for doubling federal funding for basic research, providing new incentives for recruiting and training math and science teachers, reforming U.S. visa policies to welcome highly educated foreign professionals, and making permanent the research and development tax credit.

Among those speaking at the event were Norman Augustine, former CEO of Lockheed Martin and chairman of the National Academy of Sciences committee that wrote the highly regarded competitiveness report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm;” Craig Barrett, chairman of Intel Corporation; Harold McGraw, CEO of The McGraw-Hill Companies; and Robert Dynes, president of the University of California system.


RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES AND AAMC PUBLISH WHITE PAPER ON TECHNOLOGY LICENSING UPDATED

Under the leadership of Stanford University, technology managers at several major research universities and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) have issued a white paper on “recommended rules for engagement for university technology transfer.” The paper was discussed March 12 at the AAU Senior Research Officers meeting at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.


A press release from Stanford University says the white paper “aims to encourage technology transfer agreements to facilitate broad development and dissemination of university-generated technologies. A key point is that researchers at universities across the country should be able to continue to work with intellectual property that has been licensed to commercial concerns.” The press release is available at: http://news-service.stanford.edu/pr/2007/pr-tech-030707.html.
ASSOCIATIONS COMMENT ON PATENT REFORM LEGISLATION

Four higher education associations, including AAU, have developed a position paper on patent reform proposals, specifically on the Patent Reform Act of 2006 (S. 3818), which was introduced last August by Senate Judiciary Committee leaders Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Patrick Leahy (D-CT). The Senators are expected to reintroduce S. 3818, or a slightly modified version of the bill, as the starting point for patent reform legislation in this Congress.

The associations’ position paper—prepared by AAU, the American Council on Education, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and the Council on Governmental Relations—is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/intellect/Comments_S3818_Patent_Reform_Act_07.pdf.

In the House, Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA), chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property, has said patent reform is a high priority for his panel. He is working on legislation that he is expected to introduce soon.

NAS PANEL TO DISCUSS REPORT ON TITLE VI INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT MARCH 27 BRIEFING

A committee of the National Academies of Science (NAS) has scheduled a March 27 public briefing on its report on international education programs in the Department of Education. The report, requested by the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education, will evaluate the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays international education programs authorized by the Higher Education Act.

The briefing is scheduled for Tuesday, March 27, at 12:30 p.m. in Room 100 of the National Academies’ Keck Building, 500 Fifth Street, NW, Washington, D.C. Those wishing to attend should contact Mary Ann Kasper at mkasper@nas.edu or 202-334-1816.

A live audio cast of the briefing, with the ability to submit questions, will be available at http://national-academies.org.

ASSOCIATIONS URGE SUPPORT FOR STUDY-ABROAD LEGISLATION

The six presidentially based higher education associations sent a letter to leaders of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 14 thanking them for introducing legislation to increase the number of U.S. students able to participate in study-abroad programs. The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2007 (H.R. 1469) would create a national study-abroad fellowship program, to be administered by an independent organization. The sponsors of the legislation have set a goal of one million U.S. students studying abroad annually within 10 years.
The legislation, introduced by Reps. Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), is based on recommendations from the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program.


UPDATED SCHEDULE AVAILABLE FOR MARCH 26-27 HUMANITIES CONFERENCE AND ADVOCACY DAY

This year’s Humanities Conference and Advocacy Day are scheduled for March 26-27. An updated schedule for the events is attached. The National Humanities Alliance conference activities will begin on March 26 and will include a legislative briefing and an advocacy training session for Advocacy Day participants.

Humanities Advocacy Day on March 27 will begin with a breakfast program from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. in Room B-369 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The event, which is cosponsored this year by The History Channel, will include a continental breakfast and humanities exhibits from campuses and other organizations around the country. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Chairman Bruce Cole and the co-chairs of the Congressional Humanities Caucus, Representatives David Price (D-NC) and Phil English (R-PA), will speak at the breakfast.

Following visits to congressional offices during the late morning and early afternoon, participants will reconvene for a debriefing from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the United Methodist Building, at 100 Maryland Avenue, NE.

Additional information from the online Humanities Advocacy Day Sourcebook is available at: http://www.nhalliance.org/conference/2007/sourcebook. Questions about registration or advocacy visits should be directed to Erin Smith, National Humanities Alliance Communications & Membership Officer, at 202-296-4994 ext. 150 or esmith@nhalliance.org.

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