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CONTENTS
CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
Congress Makes Progress on the FY08 Budget Resolution  UPDATED
AAU and NASULGC Thank House Leaders for Support of Research and Education in FY08 Budget Resolution
Sixty-Four Senators Endorse President’s FY08 Request for Department of Energy Office of Science  NEW
Senate Letter on NSF Funding Garners 44 Signatures  NEW
OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS
Senate to Consider Stem-Cell Legislation in Mid-April  NEW
EXECUTIVE BRANCH
Secretary of Education Holds “Summit” on Higher Education
OTHER
Associations Pledge Support for House Math-Science Education Bill  NEW
National Academies’ Report Suggests International Education Improvements
Higher Education Associations Detail Concerns about IPEDS Proposal
Humanities Advocacy Day Features More than 150 Hill Visits  NEW
ACE Issues Memo on Congressional Lobbying and Ethics Reform  NEW

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

Both the House and Senate have adjourned for the spring recess. The Senate will return on Tuesday, April 10, and the House on Monday, April 16.

CongressDaily reports that when the Senate returns, leaders expect to take up conference reports on both the FY08 budget resolution and the FY07 supplemental appropriations package. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said the Senate also would consider stem-cell research legislation (see item below), a change in the Medicare prescription drug benefit, and an intelligence reauthorization bill. A debate on immigration reform is planned for the last two weeks of May, just before the Memorial Day recess.

When the House returns April 16, leaders also expect to deal with the conference reports for the FY08 budget resolution and the FY07 supplemental appropriations bill. In addition, they plan to consider the FY08 Defense authorization bill and a voting rights bill for the District of Columbia.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
Now that the House and Senate have approved their respective versions of the FY08 budget resolution, negotiations will begin on a conference report for consideration when the two chambers return from spring recess. CQToday reports that discussions are expected to move quickly. House Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt (D-SC) wants the budget conference to be completed by early May so appropriators can receive discretionary spending allocations and begin moving FY08 funding bills.

In general, both resolutions assume higher discretionary spending in FY08 than the President has requested. The House version would provide $956 billion in discretionary spending, or $23 billion above the President’s request of $933 billion and $7 billion above the Senate level of $949 billion. Both versions include $2 billion in advance FY09 appropriations.

AAU staff have been told that both measures assume higher spending in FY08 than the President’s budget for student aid and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and at least the President’s FY08 request for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy Office of Science, and NASA. Both resolutions also include positive statements about federal research funding.

Although the budget resolution is an important guide for congressional spending allocations, it is worth recalling that the measure is not signed into law by the President and that the only number that binds the appropriations committees is the discretionary spending total.

AAU and NASULGC Thank House Leaders for Support of Research and Education in FY08 Budget Resolution

AAU and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) sent House Democratic leaders a letter March 28 thanking them for the support for science and higher education contained in the FY08 House budget resolution.

The letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and House Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt (D-SC) specifically references increases in the budget resolution for three key budget functions: 250, 500, and 550. (See items above.)


Sixty-Four Senators Endorse President’s FY08 Request for Department of Energy Office of Science

A group of 64 Senators have signed a letter to Senate appropriators urging them to provide the President’s full FY08 request of $4.4 billion for research and education programs in the Department of Energy’s Office of Science.

The letter and a list of cosigners are available on the American Physical Society Web site at: http://www.aps.org/policy/issues/research-funding/fy08signers.cfm
SENATE LETTER ON NSF FUNDING GARNERS 44 SIGNATURES NEW

Forty-four Senators have urged Senate Appropriations Committee leaders to fund the National Science Foundation (NSF) at the President’s FY08 request of $6.43 billion, an increase of nearly eight percent.


OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

SENATE TO CONSIDER STEM CELL LEGISLATION IN MID-APRIL NEW

The Senate will consider stem-cell research legislation the second week of April, when the chamber returns from its spring recess. The 20-hour debate is scheduled to begin on Tuesday, April 10, and conclude with votes on Wednesday or Thursday of that week.

Two bills will be considered. The first is the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (S. 5). This is the same bill that passed the House earlier this year (H.R. 3) and passed both the House and Senate last Congress, except that it has been augmented with language that the Senate approved unanimously last year in the form of S. 2754.

The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act would authorize federal funding of human embryonic stem cell research conducted on cell lines derived from embryos developed from in-vitro fertilization that otherwise would be discarded. Last session’s bill, S. 2754, would authorize federal funding for research in the derivation and use of human pluripotent stem cells obtained by means that do not harm human embryos, such as from umbilical cord blood and adult stem cells.

The second bill, as yet unnumbered, will address “alternative” means of stem cell research. No amendments will be offered and each bill will require at least 60 votes to pass. AAU and the scientific and patient communities support the amended S. 5, believing that only a vote for S. 5 will advance science and stem cell research.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

SECRETARY OF EDUCATION HOLDS “SUMMIT” ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings held a day-long meeting March 27 with 270 representatives from higher education, business, and government to discuss ways to implement recommendations of the Secretary’s commission on the future of higher education. Summit participants, including AAU President Robert Berdahl and AAU Assistant Director of Federal Relations Matt Owens, discussed strategies developed by five working groups in advance of the meeting. Proposals from the working groups covered K-12 and higher education alignment; "increasing need-based student aid for access and success;" using accreditation to measure student learning outcomes; better serving adults and other nontraditional students; and "enhancing affordability, decreasing costs, and promoting productivity."

During the discussion, some participants expressed concern that the Department planned to undermine several important need-based student aid programs, while others suggested the
Department was overstepping its legal authority in calling for significant changes in accreditation under the Higher Education Act.

The Secretary's keynote address can be found at: http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2007/03/03222007.html

Discussions about the Department’s proposals will continue in June with regional meetings in Atlanta, Boston, Kansas City, Phoenix, and Seattle.

**OTHER**

**ASSOCIATIONS PLEDGE SUPPORT FOR HOUSE MATH-SCIENCE EDUCATION BILL**

Nine higher education associations, including AAU, sent a letter to House Science and Technology Committee Chairman Bart Gordon (D-TN) on March 27 pledging support for his legislation aimed at improving math and science education. The letter thanks the chairman for introducing the “10,000 Teachers, 10 Million Minds Science and Math Scholarship Act” (H.R. 362), which it praises for providing “specific steps to attract, train, support and equip our nation’s next generation of math and science teachers.” Specifically, the bill aims to strengthen the Robert Noyce Scholarship program, enhance the existing Mathematics and Science Education Partnership program, require expert evaluation of existing math and science teaching materials, and create new centers for developing and disseminating curricula and best practices for the teaching profession.


**NATIONAL ACADEMIES’ REPORT SUGGESTS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IMPROVEMENTS**

Federal international education programs could benefit from greater coordination and review but are under-funded for their missions, according to a report issued March 27 by a panel of the National Academies of Science (NAS). The report found that federal programs within Title VI of the Higher Education Act and the Fulbright-Hays programs fill an important national need but that funding and staff resources have “not kept pace with the expansion in the mission of the programs.” Moreover, the programs would benefit from consolidation under a new high-ranking official at the Department of Education who would provide overall strategic direction, oversight, and coordination. Inside Higher Ed reports that during the press conference to release the report, a member of the panel said that visits to eight college campuses had shown no evidence of the anti-American bias that some critics had predicted.

The report, “International Education and Foreign Language: Keys to Securing America’s Future,” calls for creating a system for independent program reviews; developing a system of “continuous improvement” for university programs; establishing new systems for measuring students’ language proficiency; and creating a new, Senate-confirmed position at the Department of Education to coordinate and oversee the programs.
HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS DETAIL CONCERNS ABOUT IPEDS PROPOSAL

Under the leadership of the American Council on Education (ACE), 10 higher education associations, including AAU, sent detailed comments to the Department of Education Monday regarding the agency’s plan to expand significantly annual data reporting by colleges and universities. The March 26 letter expresses the associations’ support for collecting “appropriate and accurate information” on all postsecondary institutions and making that information widely available. The associations express concern, however, that the Department’s proposal “does not distinguish between data that may be interesting to know versus those that add value to the further understanding of postsecondary education.” The group urges the Department to weigh the value and importance of each added reporting item against the increased reporting burden and commensurate costs.

The letter was sent to the Department in response to a January 24 Federal Register notice regarding expansion of the reporting items required under the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). An earlier letter was sent March 21 on behalf of 40 associations and organizations pointing out that the cost and time required for institutions to comply with proposed new data reporting would be far higher than the Department estimates. (See CFR Weekly Wrap-up, 03-21-07)


HUMANITIES ADVOCACY DAY FEATURES MORE THAN 150 HILL VISITS

More than 100 individuals from around the country—including faculty, scholars, students, museum professionals, librarians, archivists, and curators—participated in this year's Humanities Advocacy Day on March 26 and 27. Participants held more than 150 meetings with House and Senate staff. The research exhibits were particularly popular this year, with more than 100 visitors viewing exhibits from such institutions as Michigan State University, Rutgers University Libraries, University of Virginia Press, and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

NEH Chairman Bruce Cole and Rep. Phil English (R-PA), co-chair of the Congressional Humanities Caucus, gave remarks during the morning's events.

ACE ISSUES MEMO ON CONGRESSIONAL LOBBYING AND ETHICS REFORM

The American Council on Education (ACE) has issued a memo which summarizes provisions in the House and Senate measures dealing with lobbying and ethics reform that might have an
impact on higher education institutions. Earlier this year, the House amended its rules on gifts, travel, and other lobbying-related activities. The revisions are now in effect. The Senate, however, passed legislation (S. 1) that would modify not only its own rules but also the Lobbying Disclosure Act and the Federal Election Campaign Act. Because such legislation would have to be approved by the House and signed into law by the President, it has no effect at this time.

The ACE memo, sent to college and university presidents on March 28, said, “The status and interpretation of these rules and amendments is fluid, but we would caution all to err on the side of conservative interpretations.” The memo added that its suggestions should be considered an “initial effort to identify and answer likely questions about the evolving rules.”

The ACE memo is available on the ACE Web site at:

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