Friday, April 27, 2007

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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE   NEW

The House and Senate were out of session today. Each chamber will return on Monday, April 30, but neither plans roll call votes that day.

After the President’s promised veto of the FY07 supplemental funding bill, the House is expected to vote on overriding the veto as early as Tuesday. The chamber also is scheduled to consider reauthorization bills for the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (see item below), as well as a reauthorization of the Head Start program (H.R. 1429) and hate crime legislation (H.R. 1592).

The Senate is scheduled to begin consideration on Monday of legislation to overhaul drug safety rules at the Food and Drug Administration (S. 1082). The chamber will not need to vote on an override of the President’s veto of the FY07 supplemental funding bill if, as expected, the House does not muster the two-thirds vote needed for an override.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

FY07 SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING BILL AWAITS PRESIDENTIAL VETO   NEW

The Senate on April 26 cleared the conference report on the FY07 emergency supplemental funding bill (H.R. 1591, H. Rpt. 110-107), setting the stage for the President’s promised veto of the measure and post-veto negotiations. At issue are the bill’s requirement to begin withdrawal...
of troops from Iraq and the $21 billion in domestic spending for Hurricane Katrina relief, agriculture disaster aid, and a variety of other programs and activities.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

SENATE PASSES “AMERICA COMPETES” LEGISLATION

The Senate approved on April 25 by a vote of 88-8 the “America COMPETES Act” (S. 761), a comprehensive competitiveness bill that draws on recommendations from the National Academies’ 2005 report, “Rising Above the Gathering Storm.” The measure authorizes significant budget increases for several research agencies, including the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy Office of Science, and creates or expands programs aimed at improving K-12 math and science education.

Among the floor amendments defeated during Senate consideration were: one by Jim DeMint (R-SC) to allow a point of order against any appropriations bill containing earmarks related to programs authorized by the bill (22-71 vote); an amendment by John Sununu (R-NH) to eliminate a provision in the bill that ties annual funding increases in the NSF Education and Human Resources directorate to those of the agency overall (24-74 vote); and one by Tom Coburn (R-OK) to kill provisions in the bill regarding the Advanced Technology Program (39-57 vote).

Senator John Ensign (R-NV) told CQToday, “I am a fiscal conservative, but the dollars we invest in basic research will come back to us in spades in terms of stimulating economic activity and helping the United States to remain at the forefront of global innovation.”

HOUSE TO CONSIDER NSF AND NIST REAUTHORIZATION BILLS NEXT WEEK

The House is scheduled next week to take up reauthorization bills for the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The two measures (H.R. 1867 and H.R. 1868, respectively) were approved April 25 by voice vote in the Science and Technology (S&T) Committee.

AAU and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) wrote to the chairman and ranking member of the S&T Committee concerning the bills on April 24. Their letter endorsed the authorized funding levels for NSF research and education contained in H.R. 1867. The associations also thanked the committee leaders for including in the NIST legislation a provision that would allow universities to lead joint university-industry projects and retain the associated intellectual property rights under the Technology Innovation Program, renamed from the Advanced Technology Programs.

The AAU-NASULGC letter is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/research/Ltr_AAU-NASULGC_NISTNSF_42407.pdf.

OTHER
AAU PATRESIDENTS AND CHANCELLORS RESPOND TO VIRGINIA TECH VIOLENCE

Following extensive discussion at their spring meeting that concluded April 24, the AAU presidents and chancellors on April 25 issued a statement about the violence at Virginia Tech.

The statement conveys the members’ sympathy for the families of the victims, the survivors, and the entire Virginia Tech community, and expresses “our commitment to ensuring that our campuses continue to be safe as well as open places.”

The statement notes that individual campuses are reviewing their security, crisis-response, and communications systems and will take steps as necessary “to ensure the safety of our students, faculties, staffs, and campus communities.” It also acknowledges the importance of securing treatment for those on campus suffering from mental illness, along with consideration of whether state and federal laws should be adjusted “to ensure a proper balance between individual privacy and the public interest.” In addition, the statement calls for effective enforcement of federal gun laws and regulations and a review of those measures to make certain they are “consistent with the need for a safe and open environment on our campuses.”


AAU EXPRESSES SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATION TO MODIFY FERPA PROVISIONS

AAU sent a letter to Rep. Timothy Murphy (R-PA) today, April 27, expressing support for his work in developing legislation to modify the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Rep. Murphy’s draft bill, the Mental Health Cooperation for Families and Schools Act of 2007, aims to give college and university officials greater latitude in contacting parents or guardians of students who may pose a threat to themselves or others.

The AAU letter thanks Rep. Murphy for his leadership on the issue and for the opportunity to work with him to “refine and secure enactment of this important legislation.”

The letter is on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/issues/Ltr_Murphy_FERPA_4-27-07.pdf.

AAU PRESIDENTS AND CHANCELLORS APPROVE STATEMENT OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES REGARDING INSTITUTIONS AND STUDENT LOAN PROVIDERS

At the AAU membership meeting earlier this week, the AAU presidents and chancellors approved a “Statement of Guiding Principles Regarding Institutional Relationships with Student Loan Providers.”

The purpose of the principles is to help guide campus leaders as they review the relationships among their institutions, their financial aid offices, and companies that provide loans to students and their families.

The statement notes that “the first priority in institutional dealings with student loan providers should be the best interests of students.” It goes on to cite six general principles:
integrity and the appearance of integrity are essential in the process of identifying and recommending student loan providers; institutional decisions about lenders should be made based on student borrowers’ best interests; institutions should inform students that they may select a lender of their choice, without penalty; institutions should disclose the criteria for recommending lenders; institutional personnel involved with student aid programs should accept no personal benefit from a lender; and institutions should take steps to ensure that lender representatives dealing with students disclose their affiliation and not assert or imply they work for the university and that no lender in the course of permissibly serving the institution promote a particular lender’s loan product.


AAU PRESIDENT TESTIFIES ON NSF AND NASA BUDGETS NEW

AAU President Robert M. Berdahl testified April 24 before a House appropriations subcommittee on the FY08 budgets for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and NASA. President Berdahl told the House Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee that AAU strongly supports the President’s $6.4 billion request for NSF. “The Administration’s request represents a positive response to countless calls from the business, university, and scientific communities to invest more federal funds in fundamental research at NSF,” he said.

He noted, however, that the proposed $17.3 billion budget for NASA is below what is needed for the space agency to fulfill its multiple missions. He requested an additional $300 million for NASA in order to provide an “appropriate balance in funding” among NASA’s science, aeronautics, and exploration accounts.

President Berdahl’s written testimony is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/Test_NSF-NASA_4-24-07.pdf.

INNOVATION TASK FORCE URGES INCREASED FUNDING FOR PHYSICAL SCIENCES & ENGINEERING RESEARCH

The Task Force on the Future of American Innovation, in which AAU participates, sent letters to House and Senate appropriations leaders on April 24 urging them to provide significant funding increases for agencies that support research in the physical sciences and engineering, consistent with the President’s FY08 budget and the House and Senate versions of the FY08 budget resolution.

The letters, signed by 26 companies, research institutions, and higher education, scientific, and industry associations, were sent to the chairmen and ranking members of the House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee. The letter to Senate appropriators requests $4.4 billion for the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science in FY08; the letter to House leaders requests the same increase for the DOE Office of Science as well as $6.43 billion for NSF and $504 million for the NIST Scientific and Technical Research and Services office.
“By fully funding the DOE Office of Science, NSF and NIST,” the letters state, “Congress would put the United States on a path to reenergize the innovation economy that has so benefited our country.”


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