Friday, August 31, 2007

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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

Congress was out of session this week for the August recess. Both chambers will return on Tuesday, September 4.

On September 4, the Senate will consider H.R. 2642, the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs appropriations bill, and debate and vote on the nomination of former Rep. Jim Nussle to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget. No further schedule has been announced.

The House on Tuesday and Wednesday will consider a series of bills under suspension of the rules. Between Wednesday and Friday, the House is scheduled to consider H.R. 1908, the Patent Reform Act of 2007, as well as H.R. 811, the Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2007, and H.R. 2786, the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2007. The patent reform bill will most likely be considered on Friday, September 7.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

BUSINESS, HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITIES URGE DELETION OF APPROPRIATIONS RIDER ON EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION SYSTEM  NEW

Earlier this week, members of the business and higher education communities, including AAU, sent a letter to all members of the Senate opposing an immigration-related policy rider contained in several appropriations bills. The measure, which the House has included in five bills, would require all contractors who receive a federal contract funded by the bill to participate in the “E-Verify,” or “Basic Pilot,” employment verification system. The House included the rider in the following appropriations bills:
The E-Verify program, which until recently was called Basic Pilot, is currently a voluntary, Web-based system that approximately 16,000 employers use to verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees. The letter to senators states that the appropriations measures would require well over 200,000 employers to participate in the system. The letter, dated August 27, also notes that program participants have raised concerns about the reliability and efficiency of the system since its establishment in 1997.

“We endorse the concept of a secure, reliable electronic employment verification system,” the letter states. “However, the current pilot program is not up to the challenge of immediately increasing its participant level to include an estimated 200,000 federal contractors – more than a 10-fold increase over current usage. The decade-old pilot program has also proven to be insufficient in detecting identity theft. In addition, Basic Pilot’s significant ‘non-confirmation’ rate would result in the erroneous rejection of significant numbers of U.S. citizens and permanent residents, adding an enormous burden on the Social Security Administration.”

The letter urges the Senate not to include the provisions in its versions of the appropriations bills or in the final conference versions.

The letter can be found on the AAU Web site at http://www.aau.edu/homeland/lttr_HRInit_08Riders.pdf.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

OSTP, OMB ANNOUNCE FY09 ADMINISTRATION R&D PRIORITIES

On August 14, Acting OMB Director Stephen S. McMillin and Office of Science and Technology Policy Director John H. Marburger issued a seven-page memo to executive departments and agencies outlining the "FY 2009 Administration Research and Development Budget Priorities." The memo provides guidance for setting agency research priorities, identifies interagency efforts that should receive “special focus” in agency budget requests, and reaffirms the “R&D Investment Criteria” that were spelled out in last year’s memo. It leads off with the “Presidential Priority” of the American Competitiveness Initiative. Although homeland security, global climate change, energy independence and “understanding complex biological systems” are among the highlighted administration priorities, policy and funding details for these specific priorities or the relevant agencies are not provided.


USDA SEEKS COMMENTS ON UPDATED ANIMAL CARE POLICY MANUAL
USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has updated its Animal Care Policies manual and is soliciting public comments on the revisions. The deadline for comments is September 24. According to APHIS, the guidance, developed “primarily for USDA’s Animal Care field inspectors, and provided to the regulated community…clarifies, interprets, and/or provides examples of how to comply with an existing Animal Welfare Act regulation or standard.” Although such guidance is not binding, as statutes or regulations are, it nonetheless has significant bearing on the management of research animal care and facilities. CFR members may wish to alert relevant campus colleagues of the September 24 comment deadline.

The APHIS Web site is accessible here: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/guidance/

The Animal Care Policy Manual can be found here: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/policy.shtml

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