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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House is not in session today. The Senate was in session today to work on the FY08 Defense authorization bill (H.R. 1585), but has adjourned. Both chambers will reconvene on Monday, September 24.

Next week will be busy. With fiscal year 2008 a little more than a week away, Congress will focus on approving a continuing resolution (CR) to sustain funding for federal programs until the FY08 appropriations process can be completed. CQToday reports that House Democrats are considering a five-week CR. However, it seems unlikely that the process can be finished that early and that one or more additional CRs will be needed. So far, the Senate has completed just four of the 12 FY08 appropriations bills, none has been enacted, and President Bush has threatened to veto several of the bills over spending and other issues.

Next week both chambers also will consider a final compromise on reauthorization of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which the President also has threatened to veto.

The House also is expected to consider legislation to protect workers from an artificial butter flavoring in microwave popcorn (H.R. 2693) and a bill to overhaul the nation’s flood insurance program (H.R. 3121). The Senate will continue consideration of the Defense authorization bill (H.R. 1585) and the conference report on the Water Resources Development Act (H.R. 1495).
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

FY08 RECONCILIATION BILL AWAITS PRESIDENT’S SIGNATURE; AAU HAS UPDATED ITS RECONCILIATION SIDE-BY-SIDE CHART

Congress has sent the final version of the FY08 budget reconciliation bill (H.R. 2669) to the White House, but at this writing the President has not yet signed the measure. The College Cost Reduction and Access Act cuts about $22 billion over five years from student loan subsidies, primarily through a reduction in lender special allowance payments. Most of the savings are devoted to increased student financial aid benefits, with the remaining $752 million allocated to deficit reduction as required by the FY08 budget resolution (S. Con. Res. 21).

AAU staff has updated the chart comparing the House and Senate versions of the package with the final bill. The chart is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/FY08_Reconciliation_Side_by_Side-2007-09-20.pdf.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

SENATOR GRASSLEY INTRODUCES PHYSICIAN PAYMENTS SUNSHINE ACT

Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA), ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, has introduced legislation (S. 2029) to require drug and device manufactures to disclose to the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) anything of value they provide to doctors, such as payments, gifts, honoraria, or travel. Under the Physician Payments Sunshine Act, this information, to be provided quarterly, would include the name of the physician and the amount and purpose of the payment or gift. The Department would post the information on a public, searchable Web site.


EXECUTIVE BRANCH

PENTAGON OFFICIAL URGES GREATER INVESTMENT IN DEFENSE S&T

While the Department of Defense (DOD) has requested $2.5 billion less for science and technology (S&T) in FY08 than Congress provided in FY07, it appears that concern is mounting in the Department that its S&T investment is too low. An internal agency memo and paper prepared by John Young, Director of Defense Research and Engineering and Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, argues that the Defense S&T program should be expanded by $10 billion over five years to “keep pace with emerging threats.”

The Young paper, which was sent to the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense in August, specifies 20 priority areas where added investments would be particularly valuable, including “Foundational Sciences,” which AAU staff understands is basic research. The paper says this category should receive an annual funding increase of between $300 million and $500 million over five years, providing a total five-year increase of $2 billion (see chart in
“The Department is coasting on the basic science investments of the last century...,” says the paper, and “must dramatically re-energize and re-invigorate the Nation’s foremost scientific minds, especially those in early and mid-career, to focus on discovery, innovation, and synthesis in the physical and analytical sciences most crucial to our Nation’s security.”


OTHER

JOURNAL ARTICLE ARGUES FOR STEADY FUNDING INCREASES FOR NIH

The September 6 edition of the New England Journal of Medicine contains an article by David Korn and others on the importance of significantly increasing funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) because of its role as the “engine of U.S. biomedical discovery.” The agency is facing the prospect of a fifth straight year of no real growth in appropriations, which would constitute a loss in purchasing power of more than 13 percent since 2003. The authors write, “In the new ‘Century of Biology,’ with nations large and small pursuing competitive advantage in research and development in the life sciences as the key to social and economic development, why would the United States opt to jeopardize its world leadership in fields so rich in promise?” They recommend that NIH be provided a steady and predictable annual growth rate of three to four percent after inflation, as measured by the Biomedical Research and Development Price Index.

An extract of the article can be viewed at: http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/extract/357/10/1042. Journal subscribers can view the entire article from that page.

AAU CHART TRACKS U.S. RESPONSE TO SPUTNIK

As the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Union’s launch of the Sputnik satellite—October 4—approaches, AAU staff has developed a timeline showing the U.S. government’s response to that breakthrough. These actions included approval of the National Defense Education Act, which provided significant new funding for research and education, creation of NASA, and creation of the Advanced Research Projects Agency, now known as DARPA. As universities plan events to commemorate this anniversary, members of the CFR are encouraged to use this timeline in conjunction with those campus activities.


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