Friday, January 12, 2007

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House and Senate were both in session today. As part of House Democrats’ 100-hour legislative agenda, the chamber today approved legislation to allow the federal government to negotiate Medicare prescription drug prices (H.R. 4). Earlier in the week the chamber approved bills to implement certain recommendations of the 9/11 commission (H.R. 1), raise the federal minimum wage (H.R. 2) and expand the availability of embryonic stem cells for federally funded research (see item below). The Senate today is continuing consideration of its ethics and lobbying bill (S. 1).

Congress will be out of session on Monday, January 15, because of the federal holiday to honor Martin Luther King. When the House reconvenes on Tuesday, among its legislative priorities will be the bill to reduce student loan interest rates (H.R. 5) and a measure to redirect federal oil and gas incentives to alternative and renewable energies (H.R. 6). (See item on H.R. 5 below.)

CongressDaily reports that when the Senate reconvenes on Tuesday, it will resume consideration of S. 1, which could require most or all of the week. Despite the expected slog through a host of amendments, says the publication, the final ethics and lobbying measure is likely to look very similar to the bill approved last year. The House approved ethics and lobbying rules last week as part of its rules package for the 110th Congress (H. Res. 6).

The Senate’s next priorities are to consider legislation dealing with a minimum wage increase and embryonic stem cell research. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) also hopes to
develop a bipartisan, narrowly focused sense of the Senate resolution calling on the President to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq in four to six months.

Senator Reid said that following consideration of these legislative priorities, the Senate will turn to a broad overhaul of immigration and border security laws.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

HOUSE MEMBERS CIRCULATE LETTERS ON FY07 NSF AND DOE OFFICE OF SCIENCE FUNDING  UPDATED

Two groups of House Members have invited their colleagues to join in signing letters to House Appropriations Committee leaders urging them to give priority in the FY07 continuing resolution to the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Department of Energy Office of Science. The deadline for signatures on both letters is close of business today, January 12.

The letter on behalf of NSF is sponsored by Reps. Bart Gordon (D-TN), Vern Ehlers (R-MI), and Rush Holt (D-NJ). The letter asks the appropriators to provide the $6 billion for NSF requested by the President and approved by the House last year as part of the FY07 Science-State-Justice-Commerce appropriations bill.

The letter on behalf of the Department of Energy Office of Science, likewise, asks Appropriations Committee leaders to provide the office with the $4.1 billion requested by the President and approved by the House last year as part of the FY07 Energy and Water appropriations bill. The letter is sponsored by Reps. Judy Biggert (R-IL), Ellen Tauscher (D-CA), and Rush Holt (D-NJ).

Last month, AAU President Robert Berdahl sent a letter to House and Senate leaders urging them to provide added funding in the final FY07 continuing resolution (CR) for both NSF and the DOE Office of Science, as well as for the National Institute of Standards and Technology. The agencies were targeted for increased funding by the Administration.


SENATORS CIRCULATING LETTER ON FY07 DOE OFFICE OF SCIENCE FUNDING  NEW

Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) have prepared a letter to leaders of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee urging added funding in the FY07 continuing resolution for the Department of Energy Office of Science. The letter requests $4.1 billion for the Office, which is the amount requested by the President and endorsed by 70 Senators in an April, 2006 letter to the subcommittee. The two Senators have asked their colleagues in the Senate to sign the letter, which will be sent next week.

Additional information about the letter is available from Jack Wells in the office of Senator Alexander at Jack_Wells@alexander.senate.gov and Jonathan Epstein in Senator Bingaman’s office at Jonathan_Epstein@bingaman.senate.gov.
OTHER CONGRESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

HOUSE APPROVES STEM CELL BILL; MOTION TO RECOMMIT FAILS

The House approved the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (H.R. 3) on January 11 by a vote of 253-174. Earlier, the chamber rejected a motion to recommit the bill to committee by a vote of 189-238. Although H.R. 3 received 15 more votes for passage than it did when first approved by the House in 2005 (238-194), it fell short of the two-thirds (290) votes needed to override a threatened presidential veto.

H.R. 3 is identical to H.R. 810, the bill approved in the last Congress by the House and Senate and vetoed by President Bush. It would broaden current federal policy on human embryonic stem cell research to authorize federally funded work on cell lines derived from embryos developed from in-vitro fertilization that otherwise would be discarded.

The Administration’s Statement of Administration Policy issued on the day of the vote warned that the President would veto the bill. The statement is available on the White House Web site at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/legislative/sap/110-1/hr3sap-h.pdf.

In the Senate, the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee are planning a joint hearing on stem cell research, tentatively scheduled for January 19th. The Senate will consider S. 5, the companion measure to H.R. 3, soon after. Since amendments are expected in the Senate, the bill is likely to require a House-Senate conference to reconcile differences.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY DESCRIBES IMPACT OF FY07 CR AT FY06 LEVELS

The Department of Energy (DOE) has released a document on the impact of a year-long FY07 continuing resolution (CR) on its major agencies and programs.

According to DOE, programs in the Office of Science would see significant reductions. Among the examples, Basic Energy Sciences would support 295-320 fewer researchers and students than in FY06 and the Spallation Neutron Source would not operate at all in FY07. For Biological and Environmental Research, a solicitation for new bioenergy research centers would be cancelled, and for High Energy Physics, Fermilab staffers would be furloughed for one month.

The full DOE document is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/CR_Impacts_on_DOE.pdf, along with FY07 policy guidance from the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Education. FY07 guidance documents from additional agencies will be posted as they become available.

COMMERCE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES NEXT MEETING AND NEW LEADERSHIP OF DEEMED EXPORT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Through a January 5 notice in the *Federal Register*, the Department of Commerce has announced the first regional meeting of the Deemed Export Advisory Committee (DEAC), as well as how the agency will replace Robert M. Gates, former president of Texas A&M University, who resigned as the panel’s co-chair last month when he was confirmed as Secretary of Defense.

The DEAC meeting is scheduled for January 22-23 at the American Electronics Association at 5201 Great American Parkway in Santa Clara, California. The first day of the meeting is open to the public and will run from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The second day will be a closed session from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Members of the public are invited to present oral comments at the meeting, to the extent time permits. Those making a presentation are asked to submit their presentations or comments in advance for distribution to the DEAC members. AAU and the Council on Governmental Relations are working to ensure that the views of the academic research community are represented in comments at the meeting.

AAU staff understands that the Commerce Department expects to hold three additional regional meetings during the spring and summer before the DEAC concludes it work with a final meeting in Washington, D.C. in the fall. Public comment periods are expected at all of the regional meetings.

The advisory committee has been co-chaired by former Lockheed Martin CEO Norm Augustine and Dr. Gates. Rather than replace Dr. Gates directly, Mr. Augustine will remain as chair of DEAC, and two vice-chairs have been designated from the existing panel: Sean O’Keefe, chancellor of Louisiana State University, and Ruth David, president and CEO of Analytic Services, Inc.

The January 5 Federal Register announcement is available at: [http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20071800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/06-9983.htm](http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20071800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/06-9983.htm).

The advisory panel was created last May after the Commerce Department rejected recommendations by its Office of Inspector General to expand requirements for universities to obtain export licenses when international students and faculty conduct certain fundamental research.

At the advisory committee’s first meeting, held October 12 in Washington, D.C., Deputy Secretary of Commerce David Sampson laid out three broad areas the panel should address: what technologies should be controlled, which foreign nationals should be subject to controls, and at what point technologies should be controlled. The committee co-chairs noted the impact of the panel’s deliberations on university research and cautioned that the committee’s first principle should be to “do no harm.”

Several high-level federal officials attended the October meeting, including Mark Foulon, Acting Undersecretary of Commerce for Industry and Commerce; Johnnie Frazier, Commerce Department Inspector General; Kenneth Krieg, Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics; and David McCormick, the former Commerce Undersecretary who initiated the DEAC and who is now Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs.
HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS ENDORSE COLLEGE STUDENT RELIEF ACT  UPDATED

Eighteen higher education associations, including AAU, sent a letter to House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA) on January 11 expressing support for the College Student Relief Act (H.R. 5), which is scheduled for House floor consideration next Wednesday, January 17. The measure would cut the interest rate on Stafford loans for undergraduates in half over five years. The costs would be offset by savings elsewhere in the student loan program.

A copy of the associations’ letter is available at: http://www.aau.edu/budget/Cmty_Ltr_HR5_1-11-07.pdf.

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