Friday, October 12, 2007

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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE   NEW

The House was in session this week, but met today in pro forma session only. The Senate has been out of session this week for a Columbus Day recess.

The Senate will reconvene on Monday, October 15, and resume consideration of the FY08 Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill (H.R. 3093), and possibly the FY08 Labor-HHS-Education funding bill (H.R. 3043).

The House also will reconvene on Monday, October 15, and will consider bills dealing with reporter protections (H.R. 2102) and railroad safety (H.R. 2095).

Leaders in both chambers also plan votes on overriding the President’s veto of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (H.R. 976).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE TO CONTINUE WORK ON FY08 APPROPRIATIONS BILLS   NEW

As noted above, the Senate next week will continue work on the FY08 Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill and may begin work on the FY08 Labor-HHS-Education bill. If both measures are approved, it will bring to seven out of 12 the number of FY08 appropriations bills approved by the Senate. The others are Defense, Homeland Security, Military Construction-VA, State-Foreign Operations, and Transportation-HUD.

The House has approved all 12 of its FY08 appropriations bills, but none has been agreed to by both chambers and sent to the President. President Bush has threatened to veto nine of the bills
because their total exceeds his budget request by about $23 billion. (An appropriations status chart is available on the Thomas Web site at: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/approp/app08.html.)

SENATE EXPECTED TO APPROVE FY08 COMMERCE-JUSTICE-SCIENCE FUNDING BILL NEXT WEEK  UPDATED

The Senate began work October 4 on the FY08 Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill (H.R. 3093), but postponed final action until next week, following the chamber’s Columbus Day recess.

As reported previously, the White House Statement of Administration Policy (SAP) on the Senate bill (originally S. 1745) states that the Administration “strongly opposes” the overall bill because it exceeds the President’s request by $3.2 billion. The SAP commends the bill for implementing the President’s American Competitiveness Initiative but rejects its additional $100 million for education programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF). The SAP can be viewed on the White House Web site at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/legislative/sap/110-1/hr3093sap-s.pdf.

During the floor debate, Senators approved by voice vote the “NASA Restoration” amendment adding $1 billion in emergency spending for the space agency. Amendment sponsors Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Richard Shelby (R-AL), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), and Bill Nelson (D-FL) said the funding would reimburse NASA for costs associated with the return to flight of the space shuttle following the Columbia tragedy, which forced cuts in the science, aeronautics, and exploration accounts.

Senators Mikulski and Hutchison successfully offered the same amendment during last year’s full committee mark-up of the FY07 C-J-S appropriations bill, but the provision was not included in the final version.

The Senate committee-passed bill would provide NASA with $17.46 billion in FY08, $150 million above the Administration’s budget request but $140 million below the House level of $17.6 billion.

For the National Science Foundation (NSF), the bill includes $6.55 billion, an increase of $124 million over the Administration’s FY08 budget request and $52 million above the House-passed level.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DOE ISSUES PROGRESS REPORT ON 20-YEAR RESEARCH FACILITIES PLAN  NEW

The Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science has made “significant progress” since 2003 in developing and updating scientific facilities necessary for U.S. scientific leadership, according to a new report issued by the Department. The report, which follows up on the 2003 report, “Facilities for the Future of Science: A Twenty-Year Outlook,” examines the agency’s progress in implementing its 20-year plan for research facilities. It finds that DOE “has made significant progress in deploying the scientific facilities and instruments that the United States needs to capture world scientific leadership, extend the frontiers of science, and support DOE’s missions.”
The press release on the report can be viewed at:  http://www.doe.gov/print/5617.htm.

Both the interim report and the original 2003 facilities report are available on the DOE Facilities for the Future of Science Web site at:  http://www.science.doe.gov/about/Future/Facilities%20for%20the%20Future%20of%20Science.htm.

OTHER

HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATIONS SUBMIT TESTIMONY ON UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENTS

Four higher education associations, including AAU, have submitted written testimony for the record of the Senate Finance Committee’s hearing on overseas hedge funds and university endowments.  The committee did not invite a representative of the higher education community to testify at the September 26 hearing.

The testimony, submitted by the American Council on Education, AAU, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, discusses the importance of college and university endowments, how they operate, and how institutions use them.  The testimony also directly addresses assertions about universities made by two of the hearing witnesses, detailing how universities are different from private foundations and problems that would be created by instituting mandatory spending rates and by taxing endowments.  The statement notes that the major higher education associations expressed support for greater disclosure of endowment information well in advance of the hearing.

The two witnesses who spoke about higher education endowments—an analyst from the Congressional Research Service and an adjunct fellow at the Center for College Affordability and Productivity—discussed the significant tax-free earnings of some colleges and universities with large endowments and asserted that growing endowments were not leading to reduced tuition for students or increased student financial aid.  Among the policy options they proposed were restricting university endowment investments in offshore funds, taxing the endowments of institutions whose tuitions rise faster than a specified level, requiring greater disclosure of endowment payout rates and investments, and requiring institutions to meet a federally specified minimum payout rate.


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