CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House and Senate conducted no legislative business this week because of the Presidents’ Day recess, but both chambers were in pro forma session periodically during the week. Both chambers will return to session on Monday, February 25, with recorded votes in the Senate after 5:30 p.m. and recorded votes in the House after 6:30 p.m.

The House next week is expected to consider a Democratic package of renewable energy and efficiency credits (H.R. 5351), as well as legislation (H.R. 3521) to modify the management of funding structures for public housing programs. CongressDaily reports that the House also may vote to create an independent office to review ethics complaints against lawmakers.

The Senate next week is expected to complete action on a bill reauthorizing federal health care services for American Indians (S. 1200). CQToday reports that the chamber also is likely to hold three additional cloture votes during the week: on redeployment of U.S. troops in Iraq (S. 2633), a motion to proceed to a measure requiring a report on U.S. strategy for defeating al Qaeda (S. 2634), and a package aimed at helping homeowners facing foreclosure and bolstering the ailing housing market (S. 2636).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

BIPARTISAN GROUP OF SENATORS URGES FY09 COMPETITIVENESS FUNDING

A bipartisan group of 17 Senators sent a letter to Senate Budget Committee leaders on February 14 urging them to provide significant funding increases for basic scientific research and mathematics and science education initiatives in the FY09 budget resolution. These increases, said the letter, would “accommodate the programs authorized in the America COMPETES Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-69), which the President signed into law on August 9, 2007.”
The letter requested funding increases of at least $1.57 billion for the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy, at least $208.6 million for the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and at least $708 million for America COMPETES programs in the Department of Education.

OTHER

AAU AND COGR RESPOND TO DEAC REPORT ON EXPORT CONTROL REGULATIONS

AAU and the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) wrote to Commerce Department Secretary Carlos Gutierrez on February 20 expressing their views on recommendations made by the Deemed Export Advisory Committee (DEAC) on revising deemed export control regulations. The letter is intended to provide a university perspective on the DEAC recommendations as the Department considers their implementation.

The Department created DEAC in May 2006 after its leaders rejected recommendations by its Office of Inspector General to expand requirements for universities to obtain export licenses for international students and faculty to conduct certain fundamental research. The Committee, chaired by retired Lockheed Martin CEO Norman Augustine, held six meetings around the country to gather information for use in crafting the report to the Secretary, which the panel submitted on December 20.

The AAU-COGR letter to the Secretary praises the Committee for its work and for its principal conclusion that the existing deemed export control system is broken and should be replaced. The letter also agrees with the Committee that the list of technologies covered by deemed export controls should be shortened and that technologies on the Commerce Control List (CCL) should sunset automatically after one year unless a review demonstrates that they should remain.

But the letter also raises concern about the Committee’s proposed seven-point plan for determining if a foreign student or scholar requires an export license to conduct certain research, including that the first step is determination of an individual’s loyalty to the United States. The letter recommends that the first step should be determining if the activity is fundamental research, not if the individual involved can meet a loyalty test. The letter also argues that criteria for determining if an individual is trustworthy to work with a controlled technology should rest on specific, credible information that the person would disclose the technology or commit or support an attack on the U.S. using the technology.

Additionally, the AAU-COGR letter opposes the proposed change to the definition of “fundamental research” because the current definition is a well-understood term of art. The proposed change would reduce the clarity of the definition. It also could encourage the proliferation of publication restrictions on research projects by expanding the definition to include information that is “not precluded from publication contractually or by other regulatory mechanisms.”

Earlier this month, the Commerce Department’s Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) announced in a press release that it had reviewed the DEAC report and would begin working with its federal agency partners, including the Departments of Defense, State, and Energy, “to consider the report’s analysis and recommendations as a basis for reformed current deemed exports policy.”
The February 6 press release indicates that the Department plans to immediately:

- Create an Emerging Technologies Advisory Committee, composed of representatives from leading research universities, government research labs, and industry to make recommendations to BIS regarding emerging technologies on a regular basis; and
- Improve outreach and engagement efforts to the academic and technology communities about the progress and scope of the deemed export policy efforts.

**AAU COSPONSORS SESSION WITH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES’ S&T ADVISORS**

AAU cosponsored a session last weekend at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in which the science and technology advisors of the presidential campaigns of Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama discussed their candidates’ S&T plans. The campaign of Republican candidate John McCain was unable to schedule a representative to participate. The forum, which was held February 16 as part of the AAAS meeting in Boston, was also cosponsored by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

Both Clinton representative Thomas Kalil and Obama representative Alec Ross said their candidates supported doubling federal funding for basic science, reducing the “politicization” of federal research, and bolstering the use of technology to streamline health care. They also expressed support for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education as key to the nation’s 21st century workforce.

Additional information about the event and the advisors’ remarks is available in a press release on the AAAS Web site.

Last month, AAU joined with AAAS in creating a Web site to serve as an S&T resource for the 2008 presidential candidates and to provide the S&T community and others with the candidates’ positions on S&T issues. The site, “Science & Technology in the 2008 Election,” includes news updates, links to the candidates S&T statements and positions, reports, surveys, and events.

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