Friday, October 16, 2009

CONTENTS
CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE   NEW
BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS
Senate Continues Work on FY10 Appropriations Bills   NEW
Commerce-Justice-Science Bill Delayed in Senate; Coburn NSF Amendment Pending   NEW
OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
AAU and APLU Urge Greater Research Funding in Senate Energy Bill   NEW
OTHER
Epstein Named Director of AAAS Center for Science, Technology, and Security Policy   NEW

CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE   NEW

The House was in pro forma session today; the Senate did not meet.

The Senate will reconvene on Monday, October 19, and begin consideration of legislation to change the formula for Medicare physician reimbursement (S. 1776). Later in the week, the chamber is expected to consider the conference report for FY10 Homeland Security appropriations (H.R. 2892) and the FY10 Defense authorization bill (H.R. 2647). The Senate also may take up legislation to extend unemployment benefits (H.R. 3548).

When the House reconvenes on Tuesday, October 20, it is expected to consider a bill to authorize a Department of Energy committee to examine U.S. solar power needs (H.R. 3585) and a bill to reauthorize Coast Guard programs (H.R. 3619).

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

SENATE CONTINUES WORK ON FY10 APPROPRIATIONS BILLS   NEW

The Senate continued its slow progress on the FY10 appropriations bills with approval this week of the conference report for the FY10 Energy and Water bill (H.R. 3183). (See AAU Weekly Wrap-up 10-02-09 for details.) This measure becomes the third of 12 FY10 appropriations bills approved by Congress and sent to the President for signature, joining Agriculture and Legislative Branch. If the Senate passes the Homeland Security conference report (H.R. 2892) next week, it will be the fourth completed appropriations measure.

The Senate so far has approved just seven of the bills; the House has approved all 12. The continuing resolution which is funding the rest of the government expires at the end of October and is expected to have to be extended.
The Senate continued consideration of the FY10 Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill (H.R. 2847) this week, but the failure to garner the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture prompted Democratic leaders to postpone action on the measure until at least next week.

Of particular concern to the university research community has been an amendment offered and discussed at length on the Senate floor October 13 by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK). (See Congressional Record, October 13, page S. 10339.) He proposes to eliminate funding for political science research at the National Science Foundation (NSF). The Coburn amendment could come up for a vote when Senate consideration of the bill resumes.

During Senate floor discussion, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), chair of the Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations Subcommittee, noted that the latest recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics was political scientist Elinor Ostrom, whose grants from NSF “helped her lay the groundwork” for her Nobel Prize-winning research. She added that the Defense Department thinks enough of social science research at NSF that it is providing $8 million to fund 17 projects under the Minerva Initiative. “If one of those studies helps one policymaker make one decision to save one Marine,” she said, “I think it is worth the 8 million bucks, and I am willing to put it in the Federal budget.” (See Congressional Record, October 13, page S.10346.)

A number of higher education organizations and institutions have contacted Senators urging them to oppose the Coburn amendment. For example, under the leadership of the American Council on Education, 11 higher education associations, including AAU, sent a letter of opposition to all members of the Senate on October 8; the American Political Science Association also has initiated a campaign to oppose the amendment.

The Senate bill would provide $6.917 billion for NSF, which the Senate Appropriations Committee says is $426 million above the FY09 level and $126 million below the FY10 request of $7.045 billion. The House-passed bill provides $6.937 billion for NSF.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

AAU AND APLU URGE GREATER RESEARCH FUNDING IN SENATE ENERGY BILL

AAU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) wrote to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) on October 14 urging him to ensure that Senate climate change legislation includes funding for clean energy research and development (R&D) commensurate with the President’s request.

The letter says that although President Obama has proposed spending $15 billion a year from potential cap-and-trade revenues to develop clean technologies and more efficient vehicles, the House-passed climate change bill (H.R. 2454) virtually ignores this needed research investment. The associations urge Senator Reid to ensure that the final Senate bill designates funding for clean energy research and development that is “more in line with the President’s proposal.”
EPSTEIN NAMED DIRECTOR OF AAAS CENTER FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SECURITY POLICY

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has named Gerald Epstein as the new director of the association’s Center for Science, Technology and Security Policy. He succeeds Norman Neureiter, the first director of the Center, who will continue as senior advisor.

An October 14 press release notes that Dr. Epstein most recently was senior fellow for science and security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and served in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy during the Clinton Administration.

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