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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The Senate did not meet today and will return to session on Tuesday, May 20. Next week’s calendar includes further consideration of legislation (H.R. 3474) to extend most of the tax breaks that expired at the end of 2013.

The House was in recess this week and will return to session on Monday, May 19. During the week, it is expected to consider the Defense authorization bill (H.R. 4435) and may take up the FY15 Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill (H. R. 4660).

BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS, AND TAX ISSUES

SENATE APPROPRIATORS BEGIN FY15 MARKUPS  NEW

The Senate Appropriations Committee will take up its first FY15 funding bills next week, with subcommittee markups on May 20 of the Agriculture and Military Construction-Veterans Affairs bills. The two bills will be considered by the full committee on Thursday, May 22, along with the subcommittee spending allocations, the so-called 302(b)s.

The House Appropriations Agriculture Subcommittee will also mark up its FY15 bill on Tuesday, May 20. The full committee will consider its FY15 Transportation-Housing and Urban Development bill on Wednesday, May 21.
The Task Force on American Innovation (TFAI), a coalition of industry, university associations, and scientific societies in which AAU participates, issued a statement on May 15 praising the strong funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and NASA science programs in the House FY15 Commerce-Justice-Science (C-J-S) appropriations bill.

The TFAI letter commends the entire House Appropriations Committee for the added funding, but singles out both C-J-S Subcommittee Chair Frank Wolf (R-VA) and Ranking Member Chaka Fattah (D-PA) for their strong advocacy on behalf of the nation’s investment in science.

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS PANEL HOLDS HEARING ON DEFENSE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense held a hearing on May 14 on defense science and technology (S&T) in the FY15 budget. Witnesses comprised research leaders from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the three military services, and DARPA. Although the session focused largely on applied research and development programs and projects at DOD, it was clear that budget cuts, particularly those imposed by sequestration, are having harmful effects on the entire defense S&T ecosystem.

In his prepared testimony, Assistant Secretary for Defense Research and Engineering Alan Shaffer focused on the effects on the DOD S&T workforce:

“This past year has been unlike previous years in our community; the collective impact of the sequester-forced civilian furlough and program curtailment, the October 2013 government shutdown, and the indirect impacts of the sequester, such as restrictions on our young scientists and engineers attending technical conferences, has impacted the health of our workforce and the programs they execute in ways that we are just beginning to understand” (page 2).

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE SCHEDULES MARKUP OF PATENT LITIGATION BILL FOR MAY 22

The Senate Judiciary Committee has announced that it will consider legislation to curb abusive patent practices on Thursday, May 22. Markup of the bill, S. 1720, has been postponed several times because of disagreements over how to address abusive patent litigation without harming the ability of patent holders to legitimately enforce their patents.

If the markup is held, a draft Manager’s Amendment is expected to be distributed on May 19 or 20.
Universities and allied groups have continued to stress the importance of balance in any legislation and the need to avoid overly broad provisions that would diminish the value of patents and weaken the nation’s innovative capacity.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

PRESIDENT SIGNS DATA ACT INTO LAW NEW

President Obama on May 9 signed into law the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act) (S. 994), legislation which not only will provide greater financial transparency in federal grants and contracts spending but also will take important steps toward streamlining the reporting process. The goal is to eliminate duplicative financial reporting requirements and reduce compliance costs.

When the House approved the bill on April 28, AAU issued a statement commending Congress for its bipartisan approval of the bill measure.

PENTAGON RELEASES FINAL MOU ON TUITION ASSISTANCE FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND OTHERS NEW

The Department of Defense (DoD) on May 15 published the final memorandum of understanding (MOU) for its tuition assistance program for active service members, veterans, spouses, and other family members. Colleges and universities will have 60 days to sign the MOU in order to participate in the Defense Department’s tuition assistance program.

The final MOU incorporates the principles of excellence for educational institutions serving military service members and others that were laid out in an Executive Order the President signed in April, 2012.

The MOU requires all educational institutions that participate in the tuition assistance program to provide “meaningful” information to students about the financial cost and attendance at the institution, agree to avoid using unfair, deceptive and abusive recruiting practices, and to provide academic and student support services to service members and their families.

Educational institutions with a current DoD Voluntary Education Partnership MOU that have initiated their application for Title IV eligibility with the Department of Education will have 18 months following the publication of this final rule to successfully meet the Title IV requirement. New applicants will be required to meet the Title IV requirement before signing a DoD Voluntary Education Partnership MOU. Additional analysis will soon be made available.

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