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CONTENTS:

BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS, & TAX ISSUES
Associations Urge Congressional Budget Leaders to Raise FY16 Spending Caps

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
House Science Committee Approves R&D Efficiency Bill
Senator Coons Introduces the STRONG Patents Act

OTHER
AAU Cosponsors UIDP Webinar on Innovative Models for University-Industry Collaboration

BUDGET, APPROPRIATIONS, & TAX ISSUES

ASSOCIATIONS URGE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET LEADERS TO RAISE FY16 SPENDING CAPS

Three major higher education associations, including AAU, sent a letter to House and Senate Budget Committee leaders on February 27 urging them to repeal sequestration and give high priority to scientific research and higher education in the FY16 budget resolution. (The accompanying press release is here.)

The associations—AAU, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), and the American Council on Education—noted that current law would hold FY16 discretionary spending at essentially its FY15 level, a cut in purchasing power for a part of the federal budget that funds the nation’s investments in the future. They added:

“We urge you to rethink our nation’s budget priorities. The solution to our continuing budget deficits lies not in discretionary spending cuts but in reforms to mandatory spending and taxation. As you construct a budget resolution, we strongly urge you to: 1) end budget sequestration in FY2016 and beyond; 2) outline a path for comprehensive tax reform, which will spur economic growth and produce new revenue; 3) provide for meaningful entitlement reforms that do not adversely affect those most vulnerable in society; and 4) include specific language that places a high priority on scientific research and higher education.”

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES
HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE APPROVES R&D EFFICIENCY BILL

The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee on March 4 approved the Research and Development Efficiency Act (H.R. 1119), legislation that aims to reduce the burden of federal regulations on government-sponsored research by harmonizing, streamlining, and eliminating duplicative federal regulations and reporting requirements. AAU strongly supports the bill, which is essentially the same as a measure (H.R. 5056) introduced last year by Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-IN) and approved by the House.

The bill would task the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) with establishing a working group to review federal research regulations affecting research and research universities. OSTP would report back to Congress within one year on what steps had been taken to carry out the recommendations of that working group.

During committee consideration, the panel approved an amendment offered by Rep. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL) that would add a third area to the OSTP working group’s review: to “identify and update specific regulations to refocus on performance-based goals rather than on process while still meeting the desired outcome.” AAU strongly supports this language.

SENATOR COONS INTRODUCES THE STRONG PATENTS ACT

Senator Christopher Coons (D-DE) on March 3 introduced the Support Technology and Research for Our Nation’s Growth (STRONG) Patents Act of 2015, legislation aimed at targeting the harmful litigation practices of patent trolls without damaging the broader U.S. patent system.

The bill would give the Federal Trade Commission powers against abusive demand letters and make changes to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office’s process for challenging patents after they have been issued, reports Politico.

AAU issued a statement on March 2 endorsing the bill. The statement said:

“…AAU supports this legislation because it targets the abusive practices of patent trolls through judicious, carefully calibrated measures that would not make it more difficult and costly for all patent holders to enforce their patents and thus diminish the overall strength of the U.S. patent system. Universities’ ability to move their discoveries to the private sector for the benefit of the public through technology transfer depends on a strong patent system. It is our hope that Congress will take up this legislation in the coming weeks.”

OTHER

AAU COSPONSORS UIDP WEBINAR ON INNOVATIVE MODELS FOR UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION
The National Academies’ University-Industry Demonstration Partnership (UIDP) held a webinar on February 26 with representatives from two AAU universities to discuss their pioneering work in developing new models for collaborating with industry in technology transfer and commercialization. AAU cosponsored the session.

The webinar featured faculty and administrators from Pennsylvania State University and the University of Minnesota describing their new approaches to improving industry engagement, increasing the depth and breadth of collaborative arrangements, and accelerating the commercialization of basic and applied research. The webinar can be viewed here.

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