

SUNY FEDERAL RELATIONS UPDATE

Friday, December 7, 2007

After a short Thanksgiving recess, Congress returned to Capitol Hill this week to work toward finding agreement on a number of issues, not the least of which are the eleven (of twelve) federal fiscal year 2008 spending bills which remain unfinished.

As reported earlier this week by Roll Call, “With President Bush ratcheting up his opposition to spending more than he has requested and agitating for Democrats to give him the “blank check” for Iraq that he so badly wants, the majority could find itself in the uncomfortable position of having to choose whether to provide additional domestic spending for health care, education and veterans or to stand firm against the president on the war.” Complicating the debate is consideration of earmarks, which House Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-WI) has reportedly threatened to simply cut out of the budget agreement in reaction to continued criticism of both earmarks and the process by which they are likely to be included in a final bill.

Democratic leaders yesterday took the initial steps needed in bringing forward a year-end omnibus, which could allow for an eventual year-end deal on both regular fiscal 2008 spending and war spending and the House is expected to consider an appropriations package on Tuesday that combines the 11 of 12 as yet unfinished spending bills. Much of the federal government currently is operating under a continuing resolution (CR) that expires Dec. 14. However, Congress might need to pass another short-term CR if congressional action on the omnibus bill is not completed by Dec. 14.

The House version of the Higher Education Act (HR 4137) continues to be a major concern. It was introduced and passed by committee in November. According to reports from congressional staff, it is likely that the House may take up the bill on the floor sometime in January. While the bill includes some positive changes, there are many concerns for colleges and universities in the legislation, not the least of which include:

- **Accreditation:** The original House bill contained a provision on accreditation that affirmed that colleges and universities are responsible for defining the standards by which student achievement is measured. This was essentially the same language as in the Senate HEA reauthorization bill (S. 1642). The provision was a specific rejection of the Department of Education’s proposal during negotiated rulemaking to give the Department and regional accrediting agencies

power to set standards for student achievement. Late during House committee consideration of the HEA bill, however, the panel accepted an amendment by eliminating the language. Elimination of this important provision in the House committee-passed bill reopens the door to determination of student achievement measures by government-sanctioned accrediting agencies, bringing with it the threat of further federalization of higher education accreditation.

- College Cost Watch List: Establishes a “Watch List” for institutions that raise tuition too high, too fast, on a HEPI-based index. There are a number of other college cost-related provisions of concern.
- Teacher Training: Institutions that participate in federal student aid and also have teacher training and certification programs would be required to demonstrate that prescribed quantifiable goals with respect to teacher training and certification have been met as a condition of student aid eligibility.
- Net Price: Institution must provide in their application materials their net price by income quartiles of their current student body.
- Textbook Provisions: Establishes new requirements with respect to textbook information that may be difficult for some institutions to meet.
- Peer to Peer: In addition to simply disclosing to students its policies on copyright infringement on campus networks, campuses are required to develop a plan for offering alternatives to illegal downloading, as well as a plan to explore technology-based deterrents to prevent illegal “peer-to-peer” file-sharing.

Please feel free to bring to my attention any other specific concerns you may have identified in the legislation—it will be helpful as we continue to educate the New York State delegation on these concerns.

Below you will find some information regarding fellowship opportunities in Washington, DC, as well as some interesting political clippings.

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Deadline for AAAS Science Policy Fellowship Applications Is December 20

The deadline for individuals to apply for the 2008-2009 science and technology fellowships offered by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is Thursday, December 20.

The one-year fellowships for scientists and engineers to participate in public policy activities in congressional offices and federal agencies are offered in six program areas: congressional; diplomacy; national defense and global security; health, education and human services; energy, environment, agriculture and natural resources; and global stewardship.

Additional information about the fellows program is available at:

<http://fellowships.aaas.org>.

Department of Homeland Security Fellowships

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is seeking applications for its fellowship program. Students must be pursuing a field of study in science, technology, engineering or math related to homeland security and conduct research in one of sixteen specified research areas. The fellowships provide students with tuition and a monthly stipend; in return students participate in an internship at DHS and agree to work there after graduation for a certain period of time. Applications are due January 7, 2008. More information is available at <http://www.orau.gov/dhsed/>

A Pregnant Pause

New York Daily News, December 5, 2007

<http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/2007/12/a-pregnant-pause.html>

Freshman Democratic Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, identified as one of the GOP's top targets for 2008, has just announced she is expecting her second child in May.

House Races to Watch

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?parm1=11>

Cqpolitics.com has identified a number of "House Races to Watch" for the 2008 elections, including six New York State races. We thought you might be interested in the data posted on their website for these districts:

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=district-NY-19>

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=district-NY-20>

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=district-NY-24>

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=district-NY-25>

<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=district-NY-29>
<http://www.cqpolitics.com/wmspage.cfm?docID=district-NY-26>