Federal Relations Update  
December 19, 2013

With the House and Senate out of session until the week of January 6th, this will be the final Federal Relations Update for 2013. On behalf of the SUNY Office of Federal Relations, we wish you a Happy Holidays!

FY 2014 Budget

On Wednesday, the Senate approved the bipartisan two-year budget deal by a vote 64 to 36. The bill passed the House last week and President Obama is expected to sign the bill into law soon.

House and Senate Appropriators are signaling they will complete a 12-bill omnibus package for the remainder of FY2014 by January 15. It is possible they could push a short-term continuing resolution—potentially a few days—to give the committees more time to draft bills. Although the budget agreement sets overall spending levels for FY2014 at $1.012 trillion, the agreement does not set spending figures for the individual subcommittees. Senate Chairwoman Mikulski (D-MD) and House Chairman Rogers, (R-KY), will have to agree to those numbers before the subcommittee chairs can work on their respective bills. It is likely spending levels will be released early next week.

The appropriation bills for Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans/Military construction are expected to be completed with little disagreement. Democrats and Republicans are much further apart on spending levels for the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. Back in July, the Senate released their version at $164.3 billion while the House had a top line of $121.8 billion (25.9 percent lower than the Senate level) but never released a draft.

Currently the process is “not very far along”, according to sources, meaning most of the work will be done during the holiday recess by committee staff. To recap, the House passed only five of the 12 bills—and the Senate passed none—in 2013. The good news is the Bipartisan Budget Act has everyone cautiously optimistic about keeping the government open.

Department of Education Request for Information on College Ratings System

Earlier this week, the Department of Education (ED) published a Request for Information to Gather Technical Expertise Pertaining to Data Elements, Metrics, Data Collection, Weighting, Scoring, and Presentation of a Postsecondary Institution Ratings System. This will assist The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in its efforts to develop a Postsecondary Institution Ratings System (PIRS) as part of the President’s college affordability plan.

NCES is interested in suggestions that address the challenges in measuring the affordability and value of postsecondary education. They are interested in specific examples of ratings systems that best measure postsecondary institutions’ value to students and the Federal taxpayer.
The development of a PIRS will employ three specific steps: First, NCES is issuing this RFI to collect information about data elements, metrics, methods of data collection, methods of weighting or scoring, and presentation frameworks. Second, NCES will host a symposium of external experts to discuss and deliberate on these issues in greater depth. Third, NCES will publish a summary of the recommendations developed from the RFI and the symposium, as well as other resources identified by symposium participants, at [http://www.ed.gov/college-affordability](http://www.ed.gov/college-affordability). Comments will be due January 31, 2014.