FY14 Budget

After the initial October 30th meeting of the joint House and Senate Budget Committee, members met Wednesday, one month out from the deadline of December 13. Talks focused on a short-term deal for sequestration. Expectations on a deal remain low, as there is little evidence lawmakers in have made progress in narrowing the differences between the two chambers’ budget blueprints. Congressional Budget Office Director Douglas Elmendorf testified before the group, with members quickly devolving into political point-making.

Appropriators are expressing frustration about the slow pace of the House-Senate budget conference. The battles over the deal including higher taxes continue to be the main obstacle. Senate Appropriations Chair Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) has stated the Committee will not start negotiations with House counterparts until both agree upon a top line number from the budget conferees.

House and Senate Hearings on HEA Reauthorization

This week, both chambers held Higher Education Act (HEA) hearings focused on restructuring federal student aid programs.

The House Education and the Workforce and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committees discussed options for simplifying federal financial aid programs and expanding access to higher education. Prior to the Senate hearing, SUNY submitted recommendations (attached) highlighting some of the impressive efforts taking place across our campuses promoting new delivery methods to simplify student financial aid.

Both hearings explored the idea of replacing the current patchwork of programs with a single grant, loan, and tax credit. Members heard about simplifying the administrative barriers for students applying for aid, restructuring Pell Grants to year-round to better incentivize completion, and improving income-based repayment options for student borrowers.

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) Annual Meeting

The 126th APLU annual meeting kicked off this week with Chancellor Zimpher delivering the keynote address on transforming higher education. The Chancellor was joined by Mitch Daniels, the former Governor of Indiana and current president of Purdue University.

SUNY was recognized for its economic engagement efforts by receiving APLU’s inaugural Innovation and Economic Prosperity Award. “Universities – and especially university systems – have a profound capacity to move the dials on economic development and quality of life by forging partnerships with business, industry, and government entities,” said Chancellor Zimpher. SUNY was specifically recognized
for demonstrating outstanding work in technology transfer, entrepreneurship, and business development.

Additionally, APLU, AAU and The Science Coalition also held a press conference, releasing the results of a survey on sequestration’s impact on research. Stony Brook University President Samuel Stanley noted the lost research projects and reduced number of graduate students forced by sequestration have put “tremendous stress” on Stony Brook’s finances and the perils of losing additional federal funding.

According the survey, the most common impacts of sequester was a reduction in the number of new federal research grants and delayed research projects.

Reauthorization of America COMPETES Act

On Wednesday, SUNY Vice Chancellor for Research and Research Foundation President Dr. Timothy Killeen testified before the House Science, Space, Technology Subcommittee on Research. The purpose of the hearing was to review the discussion draft of the *Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) Act*, which would reauthorize the America COMPETES Act and set federal research and education priorities for the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and interagency STEM programs.

Although many of *America COMPETES* goals enjoy bipartisan support, this year’s effort has been marked by philosophical rifts on controversial changes to peer review at NSF. One proposed change would require the NSF director to certify every grant would achieve one or more of six national goals—including strengthening the U.S. economy, bolstering national defense, increasing partnerships between academia and industry, and training the next generation of scientists. The director would also be required to post a description of each pending award before it is made, along with the names of the relevant program managers who made the decision.

Dr. Killeen noted: “If I have a concern, it’s mostly the message that this bill will send out to the world”, citing his personal work experience with NSF that “It is a magnificent national asset. We don’t want to throttle it back.”

Another component of the *FIRST Act*, originally introduced by Rep. Collins (R-NY) called the *TRANSFER Act* would provide grants of up to $3 million over 3 years to universities, federal laboratories, and other research institutes to jump-start efforts to commercialize federally funded discoveries. Dr. Kileen praised *TRANSFER Act* components, “We need to turbo charge the innovation ecosystem” – accelerating commercialization and mentioned the example of Governor Cuomo’s support for *START-UP NY*.

Professional Science Master’s Degree Celebrates 300th Program

On Tuesday, the Sustainable Energy Systems program at SUNY Cortland was celebrated as the 300th affiliated Professional Science Master’s (PSM) program at the National Professional Science Master’s Association (NPSMA) in Washington, D.C.

Chancellor Zimpher participated in the event noting, “If we continue to educate students through the PSM, they will be carriers of STEM, helping our economy, our institutions, and our nation.” In 15 years, the PSM has expanded to more than 300 programs at 129 institutions, integrating business skills with advanced scientific training to meet the demands of a 21st century workforce.