New York Farm Day

On Tuesday, Senator Gillibrand hosted the 12th annual New York Farm Day in Washington, D.C. The event showcased New York’s award-winning wines, beer, farm-fresh products and seafood. Students and faculty from SUNY Cobleskill and Morrisville State College participated in the event.

The Office of Federal Relations also unveiled our new “Growing New York” agriculture brochure. Thank you to all the campuses that provided information. If your campus would like copies of the brochure, please email Alex at alex.krigstein@suny.edu indicating how many and where to send.

FY14 Appropriations and Debt Ceiling

The current continuing resolution (CR) funding the federal government will expire at midnight on September 30th. Additionally, the debt ceiling will need to be raised by mid-October. These two imminent budget battles will have a profound effect on government funding.

Today, the House approved a CR by a vote of 230-189. The new resolution defunds President Obama’s signature Affordable Care Act (ACA) and lowers funding slightly under the sequester level at $986 B through December 15. It includes a provision stipulating that once the federal debt ceiling is reached, the Department of Treasury is authorized to pay only interest and principal on existing debt. This would stop spending for virtually all federal programs, ranging from Pell Grants to NIH and NSF funding.

The CR, passed by the House will serve as the first step in a 10-day battle to determine whether the federal government shuts down. Senate Democratic leaders have vowed to restore funding to ACA and strip out the debt ceiling provision, while trying to increase spending levels to soften the blow of sequestration. The Senate will most likely pass a clean CR early next week at either the $988 level or the preferred pre-sequester level of $1.058T. The House will return from recess on Wednesday with only days left before the deadline. House Republicans could sit on the bill leading to a government shutdown or reinsert their provisions and send the CR back to the Senate. The Administration issued a “Statement of Administration Policy” promising to veto the House bill and it appears all sides are at an impasse with no current path for compromise.

Higher Education Act (HEA) Reauthorization

On Wednesday, the House Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training held a hearing on innovation in higher education. Committee members had many questions on massive open online courses (MOOCs) and their impact. Concerns were raised on the impact on low-income students and if federal regulations were hampering innovation.

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) officially launched their HEA reauthorization process this week. Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Member Lamar Alexander
(R-TN) released a letter outlining the hearing process and requesting input from stakeholders. Hearing topics the Committee expects to consider include:

- Accreditation
- Keeping College Affordable
- Increase quality in higher education
- Student Access
- Innovation
- Financial Aid Programs
- Teacher Preparation Programs

On Thursday, the Senate HELP Committee held their first HEA hearing called "the Triad" the combination of the federal government, accreditors and states that oversees American higher education. Provost Susan Phillips from the University at Albany testified before the Committee. Her remarks focused on the U.S. quality assurance system, which is seen as the gold standard across the world. She also noted, the system could be improved by better communication between the different actors and better data to guide the decision making process.

Senators took the hearing as an opportunity to raise many unrelated issues focusing on the costs to attend college. Ranking Member Alexander suggested throwing out the entire Higher Education Act and start from scratch — an idea that the Chairman Harkin, cautiously said might be worth considering.

New York State Higher Education Act Briefing

SUNY, cIcu and CUNY hosted a Higher Education Act Briefing for New York delegation staff in the Capitol this week. Congressman Tim Bishop (D-NY) spoke about the future of financial aid and the devastating impacts sequestration is having on these vital programs. The briefing included perspectives from staff for the Senate and House authorizing committees on the prospects of HEA, with the only real consensus a draft bill being released early 2014.

As part of the event, a panel discussion was held on federal financial aid programs. SUNY Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Financial Aid Services, Patti Thompson, spoke about the SUNY Smart Track Campaign, and what SUNY is doing to help students and parents navigate the world of financial