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CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITIES & NEWS

FY 2015 Spending Bills May Wait for the Lame Duck

As the Congressional August recess approaches in just a few weeks, it has become all but certain that a continuing resolution (CR) will be enacted to push work on the fiscal year (FY) 2015 appropriations bills to after the November midterm elections. The House and Senate are likely to be consumed with the President's proposals for supplemental funding to address the migrant child crisis and wildfires out west during the scant remaining summer workdays, leaving little time to advance any of the FY 2015 spending measures before the new fiscal year begins on October 1. Despite Senate leadership's promise to dedicate two weeks in July for debate on the appropriations bills, the bills are not included on Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's (D-NV) "to do list" for the balance of the month. While neither chamber has acknowledged a CR publicly, we are likely to see one passed that will place the appropriations bills on hold until after the elections to allow enough time for Members to head home for a final stretch of campaigning.

Additionally, in spite of efforts by House and Senate appropriations chairs to move the annual spending bills individually through "regular order," something that hasn't happened in recent memory, it is becoming increasingly likely that the FY 2015 endgame strategy will include a catch-all omnibus bill during the lame duck session this fall. As you will recall, a number of appropriations bills, including the measures that fund the National Science Foundation, Census Bureau, National Institute of Justice and other agencies important to the COSSA community, were making their way through the process when [progress was halted in the Senate](#) over an impasse on how to address amendments. While little additional progress is expected the rest of the summer, discussions may continue behind the scenes to start preparing for an omnibus after the elections.

Senate Democrats and House Republicans Begin Higher Ed Act Reauthorization

On June 26, House Republicans announced three new bills in what they are calling their "piecemeal" approach to reauthorizing the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), last reauthorized in 2008. Since the last *COSSA Washington Update*, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) released a [full discussion draft](#) outlining his vision for reauthorization. Public comment on the Senate draft is being accepted until August 29.

The three bills in the House comprising the House's piecemeal approach are the [Empowering Students through Enhanced Financial Counseling Act](#) (H.R. 4984), the [Strengthening Transparency in Higher Education Act](#) (H.R. 4983), and the [Simplifying the Application for Student Aid Act](#) (H.R. 4982), the latter being the only bill with Democratic cosponsors. House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) has said that he expects the House to vote on these three bills sometime before the November elections.

FEDERAL AGENCY & ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES & NEWS

Nominations Sought for 2015 Vannevar Bush and Public Service Awards

The National Science Board (NSB), the policy-making body of the National Science Foundation (NSF) that also advises the President on science policy, has issued a [solicitation](#) of nominations for its 2015 honorary awards. The NSB honors outstanding research leaders annually through its Vannevar Bush Award and Public Service Award. Nominations for the 2015 awards are due by October 1, 2014.

The Vannevar Bush Award is given to leaders "who have made exceptional contributions toward the welfare of humankind and the nation through public service activities in science, technology, and public policy." The Public Service Award honors individuals or groups who have made "substantial contributions to increasing public understanding of science and engineering in the United States," such as through education and training, social media, and other areas.

FDA Seeks Comments on its Strategic Priorities, 2014-2018

Every four years, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) updates its Strategic Priorities document, which outlines the agency's strategic intentions and plans for the years ahead. The agency is currently seeking comments to help refine its [Strategic Priorities FY 2014-2018](#).

The FDA plans to implement the strategic priorities through a tiered planning framework. The agency's senior leadership will integrate the priorities into the annual budget priority setting and formulation processes, and implementation planning. The [current](#) FDA Strategic Priorities FY 2011-2015 document is available on the agency's website.

Comments may be submitted [electronically](#) or in writing addressed to the Division of Dockets Management (HFA-305), Food and Drug Administration, 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061, Rockville, MD 20852. [Read on](#) for more details.

NOTABLE PUBLICATIONS & COMMUNITY EVENTS

NRC Releases *Furthering America's Research Enterprise* Report

On June 27, the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies released its report, [Furthering America's Research Enterprise](#). The report, which was originally called for in the *America COMPETES Act of 2011*, is the culmination of work by a Committee on Assessing the Value of Research in Advancing National Goals. Language in the America COMPETES Act called on the National Science Foundation (NSF) to contract with the National Academies on a study to "develop improved impact-on-society metrics" for federal investment in research and development. The Committee decided to broaden the study to also look at the National Institutes of Health, Department of Energy, and other federal agencies.

As the report states, Congressional interests lie in "further[ing] the benefits of science for the U.S. economy and the advancement of other national goals-in particular, keeping the nation in the forefront of global competition for new technologies and other innovations," with a particular emphasis on "measures that could serve to increase the translation of research into commercial products and services." The Committee's study found that while measures can be used to quantify research outputs in certain respects, "current measures are inadequate to guide national-level decisions about what research investments will expand the benefits of science," noting that metrics are used to assess specific aspects of research in isolation without understanding the broader scientific enterprise.

Assuming a system-level understanding of the enterprise is in place, the Committee concludes that societal benefit from federal investment in research can be enhanced by focusing on three pillars: (1) a talented and interconnected workforce; (2) adequate and dependable resources; and (3) world-class basic research in all major areas of science.

NDD United Addresses Continued Threats to Discretionary Spending

On July 8, [NDD United](#), a coalition of a wide variety of groups and stakeholders interested in protecting nondefense discretionary (NDD) spending from budget cuts, held a town hall meeting to discuss continuing threats and the potential for further cuts to discretionary spending. Among the threats, NDD United emphasized (1) the continuation of flat funding for NDD spending, and (2) the possibility of a new constitutional convention that could lead to a balanced budget amendment.

The current budget situation, the town hall speakers noted, does not look good for any increase, significant or otherwise, to NDD spending. With costs increasing for areas of mandatory spending, such as healthcare for veterans, and limits imposed by sequestration and the *Budget Control Act*, it is likely that NDD spending will remain flat or see small decreases. Flat spending, the speakers pointed out, is a de facto decrease since funding will not keep up with inflation. It is also expected that a short (4 to 6 week) continuing resolution (CR) will be passed in September to allow additional time to complete the FY 2015 appropriations bills.

The other half of the discussion focused on the dangers presented by a new constitutional convention and the possibility of a balanced budget amendment. A balanced budget amendment - something often discussed but which is typically a nonstarter legislatively speaking - would be devastating to NDD spending. With mandatory spending and national defense likely to receive the most protection from cuts, such an amendment would be far worse than sequestration for NDD. However, a somewhat unnoticed threat is also looming: a new constitutional convention. Many states and organizations (mostly those driven by corporate interests) have pushed for a constitutional convention largely on the impetus of passing a balanced budget amendment. So far, eight states have passed resolutions and applications are present in 23 others. NDD United warns that a constitutional convention would produce unpredictable results that could be far worse than a balanced budget amendment. They are urging stakeholders to work with state-level partners to inform state and local legislators of the dangers of a new constitutional convention.

AAAS Seeks Nominations for Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is seeking nominations for its annual [Award for Scientific Freedom and Responsibility](#). The award honors scientists and individuals who have "acted to protect the public's health, safety, or welfare; or focused public attention on important potential impacts of science and technology on society by their responsible participation in public policy debates; or established important new precedents in carrying out the social responsibilities or in defending the professional freedom of scientists and engineers."

Nominations are due by September 1, 2014.

COSSA MEMBER ACTIVITIES

Importance of Statistics Highlighted by ASA White Papers and International Year of Statistics Workshop Report

The American Statistical Association (ASA), a COSSA governing member, has released three white papers detailing how statistics can contribute to the Administration's research initiatives and

priorities, particularly those of the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). The white papers focus on the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative, the Big Data Research and Development Initiative, and climate change. In an [overview](#) of the white papers, ASA Director of Science Policy Steve Pierson observed that the papers share several common themes:

1. "Statistics/statisticians can help to make important advances on OSTP priorities;
2. The most productive approach will involve multidisciplinary teams of statisticians, domain scientists, and others (e.g., computer scientists);
3. There is a need to attract, train, and retain the next generation of statisticians so as to contribute to all interdisciplinary research challenges."

The white papers are available on the website of ASA's magazine *Amstat News*:

- [Discovery with Data: Leveraging Statistics with Computer Science to Transform Science and Society](#)
- [Statistical Research and Training Under the BRAIN Initiative](#)
- [Statistical Science: Contributions to the Administration's Research Priority on Climate Change](#)

In addition, the report from a 2013 workshop conducted as part of the International Year of Statistics was recently released. The paper, [Statistics and Science: A Report of the London Workshop on the Future of the Statistical Sciences](#), covers how statistics is used in the modern world as well as current trends and future challenges in statistics (with a special focus on big data). The report concludes that "the view of statistics that emerged from the London workshop was one of a field that, after three centuries, is as healthy as it ever has been, with robust growth in student enrollment, abundant new sources of data, and challenging problems to solve over the next century."

COSSA ACTION & OUTREACH

COSSA Joins Partners to Urge Senate Support for IES

On July 9, COSSA joined with a number of its member associations and sister coalitions on a [letter](#) to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee expressing concern with the House-passed *Strengthening Education through Research Act* (H.R. 4366), which is legislation to reauthorize the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the Department of Education. As currently written, the bill would "diminish the autonomy, authority, and stature of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)" within IES. The letter urges the Senate to amend the bill "to ensure that NCES data and statistics are objective, independent, and relevant to education policy discussions and that NCES remains a leading part of the U.S. federal statistical system."

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.

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