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109th CONGRESS CALLS IT QUILTS! FY 2007 APPROPRIATIONS LEFT OVER

Early in the morning of Saturday, December 9, the 109th Congress became history. Failing to complete the nine remaining FY 2007 appropriations bills, it passed another Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the government operating until February 15 and forcing the new Democratic-controlled 110th Congress to finish its work.

Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Representative David Obey (D-WI), the new chairmen of the appropriations committees, are expected to announce their plans in the next few days explaining how they intend to complete the FY 2007 spending bills before tackling the FY 2008 budget. In addition, early in the new year, the Administration will send the new Congress a supplemental appropriations bill to continue funding for Iraq and Afghanistan

The CR funds a majority of domestic agencies at the lower of the FY 2006 level or the House-passed FY 2007 level. This will create difficulties for agencies hoping to start new programs in FY 2007 (which began on October 1, 2006). Unhappy with having to develop a FY 2008 budget before knowing the final FY 2007 appropriations, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), asked the Congress to exempt a number of programs from the CR's restraints. This included the U.S. Census Bureau, which needs to ramp up its operations to finish the questionnaire, get

ready for the dress rehearsal in 2008, and other activities. Congress rejected OMB's requests, but did allow the Department of Veterans' Affairs to transfer funds to boost spending on veterans' health care.

Before leaving, Congress enacted the NIH reauthorization bill (see story below) and renewed the Research and Development tax credit. Left for the new Congress is the completion of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, and legislation to implement the American Competitiveness Initiative, which contains the reauthorization of the National Science Foundation (see House Science Committee story).

Shifting political winds will bring us a Democratic-controlled Congress. Already, the new leadership has announced a schedule that discards the traditional January calendar of waiting for the President's State-of-the-Union address at the end of the month. Instead, the 110th Congress expects to spend January in session and in action. What gets accomplished remains-to-be-seen?

CONGRESS PASSES NIH REAUTHORIZATION BILL IN THE WEE HOURS OF THE MORNING

Following several days of intense negotiations between the House and Senate, outgoing chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) succeeded in using various health bills within the Committee's jurisdiction as leverage to pass legislation, H.R. 6164, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Reform Act, a three-year reauthorization substantially overhauling the \$28 billion agency (see Update, [September 25, 2006](#)). This feat is remarkable given that the Senate has not held a single hearing on NIH reauthorization in the 109th Congress. Even more astonishing, it has held only one hearing specifically to address this issue and that was in a joint hearing October 2, 2003, with the House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Subcommittee. That meeting was held to discuss the recommendations out of the National Academies' report: *Enhancing the Vitality of the National Institutes of Health: Organizational Change to Meet New Challenge* (see Update, [October 6, 2003](#)).

Forcing the Senate to act, the House chairman refused to move a number of priority measures for his Senate counterparts, Michael Enzi (R-WY) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA), unless the Senate considered the House bill on NIH. These priorities included the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Modernization Act of 2006 (HR 6142) legislation that reauthorizes the federal program for low income people with AIDS; the Pandemic and All Hazards Preparedness Act (S 3678), a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to public health security and bioterrorism, and a measure that would address shortfalls of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for a number of states in 2007.

Following the Senate passage of the NIH reauthorization bill by voice vote, the House, in the wee hours of Saturday morning, cleared the other bills. A day earlier, the House passed the Combating Autism Act of 2006 which had been a casualty of the Barton's insistence on passing a NIH reauthorization bill that did not address individual diseases.

Through all the discussions and hearings, Barton claimed that "one of his primary goals as Chairman of the House and Energy Committee has been to reauthorize the NIH in a manner that makes it more efficient." According to the Chairman, the bill's primary objective is to "get the politics out of research and let the experts at the NIH be the one to decide their priorities, rather than have politicians tell them what they should be. Very few are scientists and the determination of how to allocate research funding is best left to those who truly know and understand the needs of the research community," he noted after the House passage of the bill in September.

Negotiations, however, yielded several modifications sections to the House-passed version of the bill addressing the common fund - there will be no percentage set-aside, the Scientific Management Board, organizational authorities, authorizations of appropriations - a six percent increase in FY 2007, eight percent in FY 2008, and "such sums as necessary" in FY 2009, reporting requirements, and the Centers of Excellence.

NEW HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN OUTLINES AGENDA

Addressing higher education and science community representatives brought together by The Science Coalition at a breakfast on December 6, incoming House Science Committee Chairman Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN) reemphasized his concern with America's competitiveness in the 21st Century and his plan to improve science, math and engineering education to maintain the U.S. "as a leader in the global economy."

Gordon, who introduced a series of bills earlier this year based on the National Academies' report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* (see UPDATE [January 30, 2006](#)), which like the competitiveness initiative in the Senate, remained un-enacted at the end of the session, will reintroduce much of the same legislation at the beginning of the new Congress in January. He noted his disagreement with the President's proposed American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI), noting that improving educational performance "starts with teachers." While his legislation focused on improving teacher quality, he chastised the ACI for over-emphasizing mathematics.

Other items on Gordon's priority list, according to a Committee handout: energy self-sufficiency and independence, including the creation of a new energy research agency; homeland security research and technology; cybersecurity; environmental cleanups of metamphetamine sites; personal data protection; climate change and global warming; and NASA's multi-mission focus.

In addition, legislative staff has indicated that the Science Committee hopes to move early on a reauthorization bill for the National Science Foundation (NSF). Provisions in the aforementioned competitiveness bills included such a reauthorization that would have brought back the idea of doubling NSF's budget, something the 2002 reauthorization projected happening in five years. Of course, authorizations are not appropriations and NSF's budget has not doubled in the past five years.

Gordon hopes that he can maintain the Science Committee's reputation for working in a bipartisan manner and through consensus. His goal is to bring Committee bills to the floor on the House's suspension calendar, which is reserved for legislation that provokes little opposition. The new House Republican minority selected Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX) as the new Ranking Member on the panel. Hall, when he was a Democrat, once served as the Ranking Member under Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-WI). In a bit of irony, Sensenbrenner, wanted to serve as Ranking Member, but Hall beat him in a vote of the GOP House Caucus.

GAO RECOMMENDS OVERSIGHT AGENDA TO NEW CONGRESS

Ten days after the November mid-term elections U.S. Comptroller General David Walker sent to Congress three sets of recommendations based on the work of the General Accounting Office (GAO) "for consideration for the agenda of the 110th Congress." GAO is the audit, evaluation and investigative arm of Congress. It exists to support Congress and in performing those duties examines the use of public funds; evaluate federal programs and policies; and provides analyses and recommendations.

According to the comptroller general, "we cannot afford to continue business as usual in Washington," given the current deficit along with long-term fiscal challenges. There is a need to engage in a "fundamental review, reprioritization, and re-engineering of the base of government," Walker emphasized. The GAO recommendations are grouped in three categories: 1) issues requiring near-term oversight, 2) proposed policies and programs in need of fundamental reform and re-engineering; and 3) a list of "governance issues that should be addressed to health ensure an economical, efficient, effective, ethical, and equitable federal government capable of responding to the various challenges and capitalizing on related opportunities in the 21st century."

Walker emphasized that it is his belief that "to be effective, congressional oversight needs to be constructive." Accordingly, "related hearings and other activities should offer opportunities for leading federal agencies to share best practices and facilitate government-wide transformation." They should, he stressed, "also hold people accountable for delivering positive results in an economical, efficient, effective, ethical, and equitable manner." He suggested that such a "balanced approach is likely to help accelerate progress while avoiding the further erosion of the public's trust and confidence in government."

Targets for Near-Term Oversight

Fifteen areas are targeted for near-term oversight, including ensuring a cost effective and reliable 2010 census. The GAO notes that the "2010 Census is an estimated \$11.3 billion, constitutionally-mandated enterprise with many interdependent activities, immutable deadlines, and high stakes." Noting the size and complexity of the Census, "new processes being introduced, and interrelated nature of those processes, sound risk management can promote a successful Census." The report emphasizes that several decades of GAO work on Census matters, however, have revealed "that shortcoming in one operation could cause other operations to spiral downward." Key Census topics needing congressional oversight include:

- Ensure that the Bureau maximizes coverage and accuracy while managing costs.
- Oversee the overall cost of the Census, including the emergence of unforeseen operational and managerial challenges; and the Bureau's ability to identify, diagnose, and devise cost-effective solutions to those challenges as well as to integrate refinement and fixes for evaluation during the 2008 Dress Rehearsal.
- Monitor the Bureau's management of risks associated with key programs.
- Examine the Bureau's ability to effectively monitor contracts.

Other targets identified for near-term oversight include:

- Reduce the tax gap
- Address government-wide acquisition and contracting issues
- Transform the business operations of the Department of Defense, including addressing all related "high risk" areas
- Ensure the effective integration and transformation of the Department of Homeland Security
- Enhance information sharing, accelerate transformation, and improve oversight related to the nation's intelligence agencies
- Enhance border security and enforcement of existing immigration laws
- Enhance computer security and deter identity theft
- Review the effectiveness of strategies to ensure workplace safety

Policies and Programs in Need of Fundamental Reform and Engineering

Assuring the quality and competitiveness of the U.S. Education system is included in the 13 areas the GAO cite as needing fundamental reform and engineering. The report notes that in the coming years, "the United States will continue to face increased economic competition from countries around the world. The shift to a global economy and technological advances, and the changing population demographics are converging, challenging existing federal approaches to ensuring an educated citizenry that can effectively compete in a world economy." Accordingly, to compete in a knowledge-based economy the educational systems equip students with the "appropriate skills to meet high standards." Despite this need, the GAO notes that large achievement gaps between school age students of different backgrounds persists, and "many of the federal government's higher education policy tools . . . may not be as well suited for an increasingly diverse population." The agency also notes the slowing rate of international student enrollment in recent years. "Against this backdrop, other countries are improving their educational capacities and have implemented coordinated strategies to recruit students worldwide," is noted in the report. Key topics needing congressional oversight in this area include:

- Assess the impact of efforts to close achievement gaps among disadvantaged populations in K-16+ education.
- Assess the effectiveness of education programs in meeting the needs of the 21st century workforce.
- Assess the efficiency and effectiveness of programs designed to promote access to and affordability of postsecondary education.
- Assure a proper balance between immigration policies - such as work and student visa programs to address the nation's need for people with skills, particularly math and science - and the nation's homeland security requirements.

Other policies and programs in need of fundamental reform and engineering include:

- Review U.S. and coalition efforts to stabilize and rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan
- Ensure a strategic and integrated approach to prepare for, respond to, recover, and rebuild from catastrophic events.
- Reform the tax code, including reviewing the performance of tax preferences.
- Reform Medicare and Medicaid to improve their integrity and sustainability
- Reform immigration policy to ensure equity and economic competitiveness
- Assess overall military readiness, transformation efforts, and existing plans to assure the sustainability of the all-volunteer force.
- Strengthen retirement security through reforming social security, increasing pension saving and promoting financial literacy.
- Examine the costs, benefits, and risks of key environment issues
- Review federal efforts to improve the image of the United States.

Governance Issues that Should be Addressed

The development of key national indicators is listed as one of the eight governance issues that should be addressed "to help ensure an economical, efficient, effective, ethical, and equitable federal government capable of responding to the various challenges and capitalizing on related opportunities in the 21st century." The GAO explains that "as the pace of change accelerates, the nation is faced with new and more complex challenges, including globalization, emerging scientific and technological changes, public health, and environmental issues." The development of key national indicators to measure progress toward national outcomes, assess conditions and trends, and help communicate complex issues is one tool to help address these challenges.

The report notes that the Key National Indicators Initiative, "under the auspices of the National Academies, has begun efforts to develop a national indicator system to inform strategic

planning, enhance performance and accountability reporting, inform congressional oversight and decision making, facilitate oversight, and stimulate greater citizen engagement." A government-wide strategic plan, supported by key national indicators to assess performance, position and progress is needed, according to the report. It is also noted that such a key national indicator system for the U.S., however, "cannot be fully developed without the interest and critical attention that congressional involvement provides." Congress should:

- Take a leadership role in highlighting the need for a U.S. national indicator system by encouraging awareness and education through public hearings.
- Focus attention on the role and the contribution of the federal statistical system in providing key data and assessing areas where improvements are needed.

Other governance issues identified include:

- Review the need for various budget controls and legislative process revisions in light of current deficits and our long-range fiscal imbalance.
- Review the impact and effectiveness of various management reforms enacted in recent years.
- Review the effectiveness of the federal audit and accountability community, including the oversight, structure, and division of responsibility.
- Modernize the federal government's organizational and human capital models
- Re-examine the presidential (political) appointment process.
- Ensure transparency over executive policies and operations
- Monitor and assess corporate financial reporting and related standards for public companies accountability.

This is an ambitious agenda for the new Democratic majority that appears eager to reassert the congressional oversight role that has diminished considerably during the past six years.

Copies of the report are available at www.gao.gov.

NEW BROOKINGS PROJECT FOCUSES ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Named after Founding Father and first U.S. Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, the Brookings Institution has begun a project that will focus on the importance of science and technology (S&T) innovation to U.S. growth and competitiveness. To celebrate the project launch and the release of a policy paper, Brookings held a briefing on December 5.

The briefing featured a high-powered panel that included: former Harvard President Lawrence Summers, former NIH director Harold Varmus, now head of Sloan-Kettering Memorial Cancer Center; Johns Hopkins President William Brody; former MCI and Compaq CEO Michael Cappellas; and former Clinton Administration Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin.

Summers presented a compelling argument for the importance of public support for the science and technology enterprise. He declared: "Science must become a major national priority." This is difficult, he proclaimed, when the leader of the nation questions a cornerstone of science by suggesting that evolution and intelligent design are both worthy of teaching in science classrooms. Summers asserted that funding of science must also become a priority and indicated his concern about the stagnation of NIH budgets and the difficulties faced by young investigators in securing federal funding for their research. He also called for "controlling the politics of science funding," whether it is Administration restrictions on federal support for stem cell research or the practice of Congress earmarking funds for the favorite diseases of congressional appropriators. The Harvard economics professor also called for supporting

“clusters of extraordinary performance.” He cited Silicon Valley for computer research and the Boston area for life sciences as places where these centers of excellence have developed to support research and innovation.

Varmus also decried the stagnating federal budgets for science. He noted that “funding hasn’t changed much in the last 30-40 years” as a percent of Gross Domestic Product. He bemoaned the “roller coaster” ride the biomedical sciences have experienced with the doubling of NIH followed by real dollar declines in the past few years. He also got on the *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* (RATGS) bandwagon and noted the chronic complaints of recent underfunding for the physical sciences, a situation he, like the authors of RATGS, believes must be remedied.

Brody raised the issue of whether the U.S. had enough science and engineering talent. He worried about the lack of qualified teachers and the past over-reliance on foreign talent that may become unavailable due to U.S. immigration policies and the growth of science and technology in other countries.

Capellas noted that although corporate spending on R&D remained high, innovation was no longer in the hands of big companies. He also admonished those who took a highly nationalistic view of science and technology, declaring “S&T is now global. Get over it!” Rubin expressed a macroeconomics view of the enterprise. He noted the importance of policies that would “encourage investment” and produce “sound fiscal conditions.”

On an earlier panel that focused on solutions to the problems facing the U.S. S&T enterprise, Harvard Labor Economics Professor Richard Freeman made the case for significantly increasing the number of National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Fellowships. Acknowledging that NSF has recently raised the amount of these awards to make them somewhat competitive, Freeman argued that the number of fellowships has not kept up with the increasing number of college graduates. He indicated that raising the dollar amount had elicited a large response and posited that offering more awards would lead to a similar response that would encourage more young people to seek science and engineering advanced degrees.

Another solution came from former Clinton Administration official Tom Kalil, who made the argument for using prizes as an incentive for science and technology innovation. The Hamilton Project has announced it will present such prizes to graduate and undergraduate students who produce innovative ideas.

The Hamilton Project is led by Peter Orszag, a Brookings economist. For more information go to: www.hamiltonproject.org

NIH SEEKS PROPOSALS ON BIOBEHAVIORAL METHODS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES RESEARCH

Maintaining positive health outcomes over time and across a variety of populations and settings requires understanding interactions among biological, behavioral, and social risk factors as well as other variables that influence behavior. Biobehavioral science deals with links between biological, psychological, and behavioral factors and health. There are many facilitators and barriers to research using biobehavioral approaches, including those relating to the nature of diseases with small patient populations. Others represent broader concerns associated with carrying out biobehavioral research with patients along the natural history of an illness.

The National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR), the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR), the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), the National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Diseases (NIDCD) are

seeking applications from institutions/organizations that propose to foster biobehavioral research and develop innovative research designs, methods of measurement, and data analysis techniques. Designs and methods that examine the impact of biological and behavioral variables on individuals' health outcomes and quality of life are encouraged.

The announcement notes that most clinical trials to date have been short-term and underpowered; the results have been hard to interpret, and endpoints often have been inadequate, preventing robust conclusions. The greatest impact is expected to be derived from small, focused, mechanistic studies that can provide a high-caliber evidence base for rational management of patients. Such studies should be designed by multidisciplinary teams of investigators including but not limited to nurses, physicians, psychologists, statisticians, bioengineers, and other disciplines. The announcement emphasizes that researchers must go beyond usual collaborations to engage others to solve problems creatively and efficiently.

Other topics of interest cited by the funding agencies include novel technologies, imaging probes, or instrumentation including broader chemical diversity, assay flexibility, more sensitive noninvasive imaging, metabolomic/metabonomic approaches, extension of robotics and supercomputing networks to expand biobehavioral approaches. It notes that utilizing nanotechnology that may "herald a new paradigm for investigation behavioral/biological interfaces, predicting and preventing diseases, and personalizing therapies to improve and maximize health is needed." Gene and protein chip studies; other genetic markers to complement behavioral assessments are also needed.

Suitable topics for research, but not limited to, include:

- Development of collaborative studies to expand the understanding of biobehavioral factors that influence disease prevention, improve health outcomes, or increase quality of life in acute or chronic illnesses.
- Early identification of exacerbations of disease by documenting their occurrence with biological markers and behavioral measures of the given variables.
- Evaluations of the effectiveness of biological markers and behavioral measures to monitor specific manifestations of health status or progression of disease.
- Explorations of nanotechnology as a new paradigm for investigating behavioral/biological interfaces, predicting and preventing diseases.
- Explorations of influences of pharmacogenetics on physiological and psychological responses to therapeutic interventions.
- Test models or frameworks that integrate the complexities of biological and behavioral variables.

NIGMS is specifically interested in applications that focus upon bi-directional interactions between biobehavioral factors and the physiological response to physical injury including traumatic burn, or peri-operative injury. Studies on the interactions between biobehavioral factors and response to anesthesia and peri-operative analgesia, projects on disease processes occurring as common complications following injury or surgical intervention that are found within intensive care units, and research related to wound health and tissue repair following injury are also encouraged.

NCI is interested in methodological and technological innovation among biobehavioral studies that use cancer as the disease paradigm and seek to improve clinical outcome (e.g., quality of life, symptom management, disease progression).

January 5, 2007 is the earliest date an application may be submitted to Grants.gov. For more information see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-07-072.html>.

UPDATE TO RECESS DURING THE HOLIDAYS

COSSA Washington UPDATE will recess during the holidays and will resume on January 15. The COSSA staff wishes everyone a safe and joyous holiday! See you in 2007!

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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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