WEEKLY UPDATE
A Publication of the CGS Office of Government Relations and External Affairs
May 18, 2012

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Congressional update

This week the House Appropriations Committee approved the FY 2013 State and Foreign Operations bill. Among other things, the bill includes $587 million for the Department of State’s Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs, the same amount as in the President’s budget request. Within these funds, $328 million is appropriated for academic exchange programs including international educational, professional, and cultural exchange programs, including the Fulbright student and scholar exchanges.


Also, House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) announced that he was “not going to allow a debt-ceiling increase without doing something serious about the debt,” creating a potential stand-off on the issue later this year.

Legislation of Interest

Two bills introduced in the Senate would create new employment-based green card categories for foreign students who receive master’s or doctoral degrees from U.S. institutions in STEM fields. S. 3185, introduced by Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), creates a new employment-based green card category (EB-2A) for international students who
received a master’s or doctoral degree in a STEM field from a qualifying research university. Fifty-five thousand green cards would be allocated to the new EB-2A category. The bill eliminates the current Diversity Visa program to offset the increase in the new EB-2A category. The bill was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The “SMART Jobs Act of 2012” (S. 3192) was introduced by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) and would create a new visa for foreign-born, American-educated holders of master’s and doctoral degrees. It would allow them to stay in the U.S. for up to a year while they looked for work in their field of study. Once employed, the students would be allowed to change their immigration status and receive a green card. Bill text will be available soon through thomas.loc.gov by searching for the bill number.

Senator Scott Brown (R-MA) introduced the “Subsidized Stafford Loan Reduced Interest Rate Act of 2012” (S. 2834) which would extend the reduced interest rate of 3.4% on subsidized Federal Direct Stafford Loans for undergraduate students for one year. The bill was referred to the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

Sen. Brown also introduced the “Increased Transparency in Higher Education Act of 2012” (S. 2835) which requires institutions of higher education to post publicly Internal Revenue Service returns, particularly the Form 990, as a means of increasing transparency. Internal Revenue Service Form 990 provides information on “an institution’s budget, expenditures and the process and criteria used to set compensation packages.” The bill was referred to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. Bill text is available through thomas.loc.gov by searching for the bill number.

The Coalition for International Education submitted a letter to the House and Senate Appropriations Committee members regarding FY 2013 Funding for International Education and Foreign Language Studies and highlighted the critical need to highly prioritize and invest in the “development of high quality national capacity in international, foreign language and global business education and research.” The value of the Higher Education Act Title VI and Fulbright-Hayes 102 (b) (6) programs were underscored as they broadly support education and research at all educational levels and in a variety of geographic regions, and disciplines, and are responsive to the nation’s global needs. Currently, approximately 0.1% of the Department of Education’s discretionary budget is allocated to these programs and additional budget cuts will reduce national competitiveness and global capacities. CGS signed on to the letters.

**Administration Executive Order Issued Re: Military and Veterans’ Education**

A Presidential Executive Order was recently issued that aims to increase transparency and accountability in the educational decision-making process for active service members and Veterans by requiring colleges to make available more information about student outcomes (i.e. graduation rates), federal financial aid options, and estimated student loan debt upon graduation. In addition, the Executive Order requires the Department of Defense “to set forth rules for how educational institutions gain access to military installations” to address improper recruiting and marketing practices. These measures along with improved support services, the development of a “centralized complaint system,” and improved data collections systems are focused on strengthening protections for active members of the military and Veterans.
The American Council on Education provided notice of a memo that summarizes the Executive Order and can be used as a reference by higher education institutions. The memo is available here.

**NSF Hosts Inaugural Global Summit on Merit Review**

The leaders of the primary science funding agencies from nearly 50 countries met this week to craft and release a common set of merit review principles and to create a Global Research Council to develop additional best practices for collaboration. The merit review principles agreed to by the summit leaders include expert assessment, transparency, impartiality, appropriateness, confidentiality, and integrity and ethical consideration. The principles and the global summit are a first step toward a more unified approach to the scientific process. More information is available here.

**Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Funding**

The Department of Education is seeking applications for FY 12 Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) awards; the grants fund U.S. colleges and universities, as part of the Fulbright program, for doctoral students who are conducting research abroad in modern foreign languages and area studies. Students’ research must focus on one of several geographic areas including Africa and Asia; preference will be given to projects in one of 78 critical languages, particularly research that focuses on “economics, engineering, international development, global education, mathematics, political science, public health, science, or technology.” The department expects to fund approximately 90 new awards with an estimated $3.2 million in funding. Average size of the awards will be $36,000 but amounts will range from $15,000 to $60,000. Applications are due by June 14, 2012. More information is available here.

**COE Hosts McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program Event**

A Capitol Hill forum this week featured a panel of speakers who discussed the accomplishments of the McNair program in the context of the current federal budget environment and the proposed $10 million cut to the program contained in the President’s budget proposal. Dr. Davarian Baldwin, a former McNair scholar, noted the impact that program has had on his life and career and called the proposed budget cut an embarrassment. Dr. Orlando Taylor discussed the McNair program in the context of workforce development and global competitiveness. He cited the need for a more diverse group of people to obtain graduate degrees in light of the changing demographics of the country, noting the relevance of the McNair program to this need.

**Report Urges Renewed Investment in Biomedical Research**

The U.S. is not sustaining its historically strong investment in biomedical research that once propelled it to global life sciences leadership, according to a new report released by the Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF). This leadership is threatened by reduced federal investments in biomedical research through NIH and faces increased global competition from a number of countries including China, Germany, India, Singapore and
others that have recognized the connection between the life sciences and high wage-high growth industry. These other nations have not only expanded their financial support for biomedical research but have also adopted a range of policies including immigration and education policies designed to attract and educate the best life sciences talent. NIH Director, Francis Collins, speaking at the report release event noted that 60% of the work done on the human genome project was conducted in the U.S. but that leadership has been ceded to China. He expressed concern about the impact of NIH funding declines on young biomedical scientists and researchers. The report is available in pdf format here.

**Graduate Enrollment of Latino Students in STEM Examined**

A new report examines the borrowing patterns of undergraduate students and the relation of that debt to enrollment in graduate school. The main finding is that controlling undergraduate debt can increase the number of Latino students who become scientists, engineers, and mathematicians by enabling them to continue to invest in their education beyond the bachelor’s degree. Policy recommendations include: Continue and enlarge investments in the Pell grant program; Expand access to research assistantships, particularly at community colleges and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs); Provide Work-Study aid at HSIs for students to conduct STEM-related research. The report is available here.

**Quips and Quotes**

CGS in the News
The CGS-ETS Pathways Report continues to receive coverage in print and online media outlets. Findings from the CGS-ETS Pathways report about the long-term impact of pursuing a master’s degree were cited in the article, “Who Goes for Which Master’s Degree?” in The Huffington Post. In addition, U.S. News released “5 Tips for Recent Graduate School Alumni” and drew from the Pathways report to offer advice on requisite real world professional skills that are in demand.

Data from CGS’ Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2000 to 2010 was cited in “Helpful Tips on Managing College Finances from Cedar Ed Lending.” The piece notes that, “over 50% of students pursue education or business related degrees.”

The Washington Examiner Education section included a Data Sources article by Nathan Bell, CGS Director of Research and Policy Analysis, on “International Comparisons of Educational Attainment.”

Other News
An article in Inside Higher Ed highlights the migration patterns of scientists in 16 countries and working in biology, chemistry, earth and environmental sciences, and materials which were the focus of a recent study from the National Bureau of Economic Research.

The New York Times published an article that examined the realities of a generation that is “hobbled by the soaring cost of college.”

The Chronicle of Higher Education featured an article on the fact that student loans have become “pawns in the latest political fight.”
A Bloomberg article highlighted the use of taxpayers’ funds to compensate student loan debt collectors.

A Future Tense article calls for more critical analyses of federally-funded research in the discussion of political issues by politicians, particularly the current presidential candidates.

**A Note to Readers**

CGS welcomes Leontyne V. Goodwin as our new Government Relations and External Affairs Manager. Leontyne joined CGS in 2010 and received a Master’s of Arts in Psychology and Education: Applied Psychology from Teacher’s College-Columbia University. Leontyne will be succeeding Belle Woods, who has accepted a position as Manager of Communications at the American Immigration Lawyers Association. We thank Belle for her contributions to CGS, especially the Weekly Updates, and we welcome Leontyne as our new colleague.

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