LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

State and Federal Budgets on Track but Affected by Lower Tax Receipts

BY ELLEN S. SMITH

Passage of the state budget, already a month late, is expected within the next few weeks if the Governor and Sheldon Silver can agree on a non-binding budget resolution. At this early stage, the budget has been focused on funding and student aid. Reports indicate that flat funding will exist for student aid programs, but academic centers with economic development proposals are likely to be funded as will matching funds for grants such as Columbia's nanotechnology center.

At the federal level, the budget is on track, but disagreements also exist as to how the amount of available funds will be allocated. Other issues still remain high on the agenda including international students, access to sensitive material, research and additional mailing offices.

The federal fiscal year 2003 budget began on October 1, 2002. At this stage, the non-binding budget resolution has passed the House of Representatives; in the Senate a majority only bill passed the Senate Budget Committee.

These resolutions set broad spending guidelines and allow the committee to allocate target funding for each of the 13 annual funding committees. Budget resolutions require no Presidential signatures; in recent years the House and Senate have proceeded without an agreed upon resolution. This is expected to be the case this year.

Protection of Human Subjects was the focus of an Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing held recently. Issues raised included oversight and regulation of human subject research, additional training in medical ethics for students and restricting researchers from holding financial stakes in their research.

Unrelated Business Income Tax: Last week the IRS published final regulations concerning revisions to unrelated business income tax (UBIT) requirements. The US Senate passed a border security and visa reform bill (HR 3525) that expands the tracking of foreign students and scholars through the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS) that is scheduled to be in place by 2003.

The bill is expected to be adopted by the House of Representatives through unanimous consent. Supported by the higher education community at large, the bill requires expanded background checks for students from countries that sponsor terrorism; expanded information from students about previous history; and notification of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) if a student does not appear on campus 30 days after the deadline for class registration.

A new provision added through amendment would require the Department of Education, Department of State and INS to monitor colleges and universities that enroll foreign students and scholars to make certain that record-keeping is up-to-date. If not, institutions could lose their right to admit scholars and students. Legislators are still working on bills related to access to dangerous materials in laboratories (bioterrorism) by those from nations producing terrorists and with various health conditions.

The university community has been working closely with the staff to make certain that adequate protections, occasional waivers, and appeals are included in the provisions. Reports also indicate that some federal departments are evaluating whether or not to place additional restrictions on access to sensitive materials by foreign nationals.

A Statement on Human Cloning was issued recently by the Association of American Universities (AAU). The presidents and chancellors of the major US research universities strongly oppose human reproductive cloning, but the AAU indicated its strong support for basic and applied stem cell research, including nuclear trans plantation for cell production (nonreproductive or therapeutically cloning).

A bill in opposition to any type of research in this area is expected to be voted upon in the Senate before the end of May.

A Glimpse of Columbia History . . .

The First Varsity Show, 1894—The Varsity Show began as a fundraiser for the varsity athletic teams, but later evolved into an annual comedic tradition, written and performed by Columbia students. The first production of the Varsity Show, “Joan of Arc,” was written by Gay Wetmore Caryll and was performed in April 1894. Cast members included, from left: Franklin B. Ware, Adolf Provost, Kenneth M. Murchison, Don Barber, Dave Armstrong, Dick Hanson and Donald MacGregor. Murchison went on to become a successful architect responsible for designing the Baltimore Union Station, Hoboken and Buffalo railroad terminals. This year’s Varsity Show, the 108th, was held April 26-28 in Lerner Hall’s Roone Arledge Auditorium.

—Jennifer Ulrich

http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces/aces140.html.