

Washington Update 5-8-08

FY08 Supplemental Bill

President Bush has repeatedly vowed he will veto any FY08 emergency spending bill that exceeds his requested amount of \$108 billion. Ignoring this threat, members of the House are working on a supplemental bill that may go well over that number. Members are trying to squeeze more money in it to fund an array of domestic programs, including expanded education benefits for veterans, the Census and the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program. The science community has also weighed in on the bill. A group of 19 scientific society leaders, including UCAR's Rick Anthes, has sent a letter to President Bush and congressional leaders urging them to support a minimum of \$500 million for science programs in the supplemental bill. And a bipartisan group of 41 House members signed a letter to the President also asking him to support an increase for scientific research and education.

House Democratic leaders today are considering offering a supplemental bill that would reduce President Bush's war funding request in order to add money for unemployment benefits, international food aid, veterans' education programs, Medicaid and other programs. Such a reduction in war funding is based on the Defense Department acknowledging that the requested \$108 billion for this year's war operations exceeds what is needed. Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), said that items that do not end up in the bill could become part of a second economic stimulus package.

This bill may be voted on as early as Thursday.

FY09 Appropriations Update

Not one of the 12 FY 2009 spending bills has been marked up, and won't be, until the FY08 supplemental bill is completed. Hearings on agency budgets, however, have been conducted, with House and Senate members showing full support for NSF, NASA and NOAA. At a NASA budget hearing, Chairperson Mikulski announced that she intends to again offer an amendment to provide an additional \$1 billion to shorten the gap between the retirement of the space shuttle in 2010 and a new space shuttle is in place in 2015. The hearing also focused on the request for NASA's Science Mission Directorate. Senator Mikulski noted that while the request was steady, she was disappointed that the plans only include the launch of five of the 17 recommended Earth science missions by 2020.

At a NOAA budget hearing, Chairman of the House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee, Chairman Alan Mollohan (D-WV) raised questions about the agency's ability to fulfill its mission and congressional mandates with the proposed budget. He also noted that the requested increase was still not enough to overcome the historically flat funding the agency has received in the past. Chairman Mollohan's subcommittee also conducted a hearing with a number of "outside witnesses," including Rick Anthes, who spoke about NSF, NASA and NOAA. His testimony is up at:
http://www.ucar.edu/oga/pdf/FY09_CJS_Testimony.pdf

Earlier this week, Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN), both on the Appropriations Committee, announced that they intend to support doubled funding for the National Science Foundation by 2011 and increase money for the National Institute for Standards and Technology and the Energy Department's Office of Science, as part of a broader attempt to increase American competitiveness.

Nomination Hearing

On May 1 the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation considered the nomination of Dr. William Brennan to be Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. This position is also that of Deputy Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Dr. Brennan is currently the deputy assistant secretary of commerce for international affairs at NOAA, as well as the Acting Director of the U.S. Climate Change Science Program since the retirement of James Mahoney two years ago. Upon confirmation, he would be the director of CCSP.

Upcoming Hearings

Thursday, May 8th, 2:30 PM (EDT)

Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee Hearing

"Improving the Capacity of U.S. Climate Modeling for Decision Makers and End-Users"

This hearing will examine the current computing capacity to process climate models at the regional and local scales, the need for continuous observational data to support the models, and the basic science to support the improvement of the next generation of climate models to meet the needs of decision makers. The hearing will focus on developing applications, consumer expectations, and network operation.

Witnesses:

Dr. Alexander E. (Sandy) MacDonald, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Dr. James J. Hack, National Center for Computational Sciences, Oak Ridge National Lab
(currently on leave from NCAR)

Dr. Daniel A. Reed, Microsoft

Dr. Edward S. Sarachik, University of Washington

Mr. Bruce K. Carlisle, Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management

Dr. John Walsh, International Arctic Research Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Thursday, May 8th, 10:00 AM (EDT)

House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming

"Negawatts: The Role of Efficiency Policies in Climate Legislation."

As companies look for low-cost ways to reduce global warming emissions in a carbon-constrained future, many are finding that energy efficiency holds the greatest promise and results. Thursday's hearing will examine the potential role of complementary efficiency policies, particularly for the electric power sector, in promoting low-cost emission reductions under a federal greenhouse gas cap-and-trade system.

Witnesses:

Hon. Paul DeCotis, Deputy Secretary of Energy, State of New York

Hon. Dian Grueneich, Commissioner, California Public Utilities Commission

Steven Kline, Vice President for Environment and Federal Affairs, Pacific Gas and Electric Corporation

Richard Cowart, Director, Regulatory Assistance Project

George Sakellaris, President and CEO, Ameresco, Inc.

William Fay, Director, Energy Efficient Codes Coalition