Washington Insider

110th Congress Completes FY 2007 Budget Appropriations

The fiscal year 2007 appropriations process was finalized on February 14, with the Senate's passage of a continuing budget resolution to fund most federal government programs through the close of the fiscal year on September 30, 2007. As promised by the new Democratic chairs of the Senate and House appropriations committees, most agencies and programs were flat-funded at their fiscal year 2006 levels, with some exceptions.

Among the winners this year is the NSF. The NSF's Research and Related Activities account received a 7.7% increase in funding, due to its inclusion in the President's American Competitiveness Initiative. The NIH received an increase of $619.5 million above the FY 2006 adjusted level of $28.3 billion. The Census Bureau also received special attention with Congress allocating increases for 2010 census activities, as requested by the president. The Bureau's Salaries and Expenses Account, which supports ongoing demographic, social, and economic statistical activities, was funded at its fiscal year 2006 level.

Bush Presents FY 2008 Budget to Congress

Ten days prior to Congress's finalization of the fiscal year 2007 budget, President George W. Bush released his budget request for fiscal year 2008. The $2.9 trillion budget recommends an increase of 6.5% for discretionary funding, set at $929.8 billion. This increase mostly reflects "Security Funding," which includes the Department of Defense and government-wide homeland security activities. The budget proposes an increase of less than 1% for "Non-Security" discretionary funding.

Research and Development activities receive a 1.4% boost overall, with most of the increase going to Development, 58% of which supports Defense. Basic Research funding increases from $28.2 to $28.3 billion, while Applied Research funding declines from $28.3 to $27.1 billion. For fiscal year 2008, the president proposes another NSF increase of nearly 7%, with the majority of increased funding going to support research in the physical sciences, math, and engineering. The social, behavioral, and economic sciences have not received comparable attention by the American Competitiveness Initiative. The proposed fiscal year 2008 budget for the NIH shows a slight decrease from the final fiscal year 2007 appropriation, although the administration thought it was proposing an increase, as the 2007 appropriations were not complete at the time of the 2008 budget's release.

House to Debate Presidential Records Act Amendment

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee unanimously approved H.R. 1255, the "Presidential Records Act Amendments of 2007," introduced by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA). At the time of this writing, the bill was expected to go to the House floor for debate during the week of March 12.

The legislation seeks to nullify an executive order from 2001 that Waxman said has turned the Presidential Records Act of 1978 into the "Presidential Secrecy Act." Under the 1978 Act, presidential records are to be released to the public 12 years after the end of a presidential administration. In 2001, President George W. Bush overturned an executive order issued by Ronald Reagan and gave current and former presidents and vice presidents broad authority to withhold records or delay their release indefinitely.

The proposed legislation would establish a 40-business-day period in which current and former presidents may raise objections to the release of presidential records by the archivist. Additionally, the Amendments of 2007 would reduce the authority of former presidents to object to the release of records over the consent of the incumbent president, essentially restoring the interpretation of the Act by the Reagan executive order. The Amendments would eliminate two additional expansions of privilege created by the 2001 Bush executive order: the right of designees to assert executive privilege on behalf of a former president and the right of former vice presidents to assert privilege over vice presidential records.

NARA Brings Presidential Archives Online

On Presidents' Day, the National Archives launched a new web site, www.presidentialtimeline.org, containing digitized artifacts and historical archives from all of the U.S. presidential libraries. The 12 presidential libraries of the National Archives and Records Administration, the Learning Technology Center of the University of Texas at Austin's College of Education, and the UT library system collaborated to bring many primary and secondary source materials online. Educators, archivists, and the public can now access the 12 libraries' digitized assets on a single site. The web site features an interactive timeline of the twentieth century's presidents, special digital exhibits from each of the 12 presidential libraries, and a searchable gallery containing hundreds of presidential records, including audio and video clips, photos, and documents such as journal entries and speech note cards.

Sources for this column include the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History's NCC Washington Update*, the* Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations'* Washington Update.

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