Subject: DC Update, News from Washington
From: Sarah Walter and Mary Malaspina, Michigan State University’s (MSU’s) Washington Office
Date: March 14, 2014

* Notes:
- Past copies of the DC Update can be found on the Federal Relations section of the website of Michigan State University’s Office of the Vice President for Governmental Affairs.
- Information on federal agencies’ budget plans can be found on MSU’s Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies Federal Budget Updates webpage.

* NEWS SUMMARY

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NEWS SUMMARY

Washington spent this week debating a wide range of topics, such as health care policy reform, jobless benefits, federal grants for childcare assistance, and climate change policy. Congressional hearings included the following:

- March 12 House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Training hearing entitled “Examining the Mismanagement of the Student Loan Rehabilitation Process;”
- March 13 House Agriculture Committee hearing on the USDA budget and markup of H.ConRes. 86, Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the enactment of the Smith-Lever Act;
- March 13 House Science, Space and Technology Subcommittee on Research and Technology Subcommittee on Research and Technology markup of the Federal Investments in Research, Science and Technology (FIRST) Act;
- March 14 House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture hearing on the USDA’s FY15 budget request.

On Monday:
- the White House released its 2014 Economic Report of the President; and
- the National Science Foundation (NSF) released its Strategic Plan for 2014-2018.

On Wednesday, the NASA Advisory Council Planetary Science Subcommittee met in Washington, DC.

On Thursday, the President signed into law the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Conservation and Recreation Act into law. This legislation protects the 35-mile stretch of Lake Michigan’s coastline as a wilderness area, and guarantees public access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor pursuits.

The Senate has confirmed France Cordova, former president of Purdue University, as the director of the NSF.
Also, the NSF has selected Fay Lomax Cook, a professor of human development and social policy at Northwestern University to head its Social, Behavioral & Economic Sciences Directorate.

David Skorton, Cornell University’s president, has been named the next secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

NASA has announced that David Miller, professor of aeronautics and astronautics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has been named the agency’s new chief technologist.

President Obama has nominated the following individuals to his Administration:

- Robert Glovsky, Vice Chair and a Principal of The Colony Group, to be a member of the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Capability for Young Americans;
- Peter Groff, Principal of MCG2 Consulting, to be a member of the Commission on Presidential Scholars;
- John Huerta, former consultant to the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the American Latino and General Counsel to the Smithsonian Institution, to be a member of the Advisory Committee on the Arts for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts;
- Andrew Jackson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Technology, Information, and Business Services at the Department of the Interior, to be Assistant Secretary for Management, Department of Education;
- Barry Karas, founder of three retail apparel businesses, to be a member of the Advisory Committee on the Arts for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts;
- Deanna Mulligan, President and CEO of The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America, to be a member of the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Capability for Young Americans; and
- Ronnie Planalp, producer and co-founder of Clear Eye Productions, to be a member of the Advisory Committee on the Arts for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

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AGRICULTURE

REPORT PROVIDES NEW LOOK AT FARM EXPENDITURES
By David Rogers, Politico, March 13, 2014

Falling commodity prices and a new farm bill are adding up to a wild ride for those charged with predicting government expenditures for agriculture over the next five years. That’s the bottom line of a new analysis released Thursday that averages as many as 500 outcomes but shows the gap between the high and low ranges for the Commodity Credit Corporation can be as wide as $11 billion to $12 billion in any given year.

FARM BILL REFLECTS SHIFTING AMERICAN MENU AND A SENATOR’S PERSISTENT TILLING

The farm bill signed by President Obama last month was at first glance the usual boon for soybean growers, catfish farmers and their ilk. But closer examination reveals that the nation’s agriculture policy is increasingly more whole grain than white bread. Within the bill is a significant shift in the types of farmers who are now benefiting from taxpayer dollars, reflecting a decade of changing eating habits and cultural dispositions among American consumers. Organic farmers, fruit growers and hemp producers all did well in the new bill. An emphasis on
locally grown, healthful foods appeals to a broad base of their constituents, members of both major parties said...“This is my fourth farm bill, and it’s the most unique I have ever been involved in,” said Senator Debbie Stabenow, the Michigan Democrat who negotiated, prodded, cajoled and finally shepherded the bill through Congress over two and a half years. “Past farm bills pit regions against regions. I said that we were going to support all of agriculture.”

FOR TRIBES, NEW FARM BILL REVIVES OLD WOUNDS
By David Rogers, Politico, March 10, 2014

At issue — for the tribes and Lucas’s farm bill — is the last piece of a nearly 15-square mile tract that Arthur carved out of reservation lands for Fort Reno in 1883 — just 14 years after Grant had assigned the same property to the Cheyenne-Arapaho as part of his efforts to pacify the Plains tribes...Section 7512 of the farm bill locks down the Agriculture Department’s claim to the land for the next five years, but this is a saga that begs still for some more lasting, brokered compromise. The current tenant, the Grazinglands Research Laboratory, has been grown to fill the full 6,700 acres — and keep the tribes at bay. Its $5.1 million annual budget is a big turnaround from when the same lab was repeatedly targeted for closure in annual appropriations bills through the ’90s.

USDA WANTS TO STEP UP INNOVATION RESEARCH
By Erik Stokstad, ScienceInsider, March 7, 2014

Change doesn’t always come quickly at an institution as big and venerable as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). But advocates for agricultural research were pleased this week when the White House budget request included $75 million for three new research institutes. The announcement comes in the first budget request possible after a report by the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology recommended the idea as part of an approach to stimulating more innovation in agricultural research. The plans for the institutes, which are not yet fully sketched out, were inspired by research hubs undertaken by the Department of Energy and public-private partnerships, such as energy company BP’s investment at the University of California, Berkeley. If approved by Congress, each institute would receive $25 million a year (ideally for 5 years) that would be used to stimulate research relevant to companies and the public.

BILL GATES TOUTS AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH WITH APPROPRIATORS
By Ellyn Ferguson, CQ.com, March 13, 2014

Billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates urged leaders of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Thursday to continue to support government research on seeds and food crops. Gates, co-chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ducked into a room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building to talk with Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee Chairman Mark
Pryor and ranking member Roy Blunt. At various times, they were joined by subcommittee members Thad Cochran, R-Miss., and John Hoeven, R-N.D. Gates later stopped by Minority Leader Mitch McConnell’s office. The Gates foundation is known for its focus in funding work on health, agriculture and economic development in emerging economies. Closer to home, the foundation also provides funding for the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, a not-for-profit research center in St. Louis, Mo. The center, named for a former executive of Ralston Purina, studies plant biology with the stated purpose of using scientific knowledge to reduce poverty and improve health. Pryor, D-Ark., said his takeaway from the meeting was something he already knew: U.S. agriculture research matters in the United States as well as the world. “We do that research. We figure it out and then we’re able to use it around the world. It’s just good for everybody,” Pryor said. “Most people who pay attention to agriculture understand how important the research piece of this is. If you can get something that is drought resistant, pest resistant or insert a mineral that is needed [in people’s diets], that’s huge.” He also said Gates’ embrace of biotech or genetically engineered seed as one way to provide farmers in poor countries with more productive crops was welcomed. Gates is one of the “biggest computer guys in the world and here he is later in his life and he’s focusing on agriculture,” said Pryor. “That’s a big leap. He’s looking out long-term about what can he do to change the world. He’s already changed the world once.” At the top of the meeting, reporters were ushered in for a short question-and-answer period with Gates. Pryor; Blunt, R-Mo.; and staffers looked on. Gates appeared not to have a specific request but said he wanted lawmakers to know that U.S. research, public and private, is making a difference in the lives of people in developing nations. He praised the 2014 farm bill (PL 113-79) for authorizing $200 million in startup funds for a nonprofit agriculture research foundation at the Department of Agriculture. The foundation is modeled after similar entities Congress established for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The foundation must raise private funds to match the public dollars. “We are excited about this commitment to research. We’re looking forward to partnering with whoever the grantees for that kind of research are to make better seeds, then working to get them adopted by these farmers in Africa,” Gates said. He noted that crop productivity in African nations has remained flat for several years, even as productivity in other developing nations has risen. Gates, who made his billions as a tech entrepreneur, said he considers agriculture to be an important field that he is learning about. Agricultural research is one of the fastest-growing areas for his foundation. Giving people greater access to more nutritious food such as milk to young children is key to building a healthy population and economy. “We’ve got some great scientists here in the U.S. who can carry this work forward,” he told reporters. While he has entrepreneurial roots, Gates said there is a role for government, especially in agriculture. The trick, Gates said, is to find the most effective ratio of government to private sector effort. “The right balance is better than expecting 100 percent government or 100 percent private sector to get the job done,” Gates said.

* This is the complete news article.

**BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES**
UP TO 1000 NIH INVESTIGATORS DROPPED OUT LAST YEAR
By Jocelyn Kaiser, ScienceInsider, March 7, 2014

Has the cull begun? New data show that after remaining more or less steady for a decade, the number of investigators with NIH funding dropped sharply last year by at least 500 researchers and as many as 1000. Although not a big surprise -- it came the same year that NIH's budget took a 5% cut -- the decline suggests that a long-anticipated contraction in the number of labs supported by NIH may have finally begun.

TEACHING RESEARCH ETHICS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
By Tony Mazzaschi, Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), March 9, 2014

A ‘trainer-of-trainers conference’ on “Educating Scientists in Research Ethics for the 21st Century” will be held in Annapolis, MD, June 8-11, 2014. The conference is relevant to individuals in all research-oriented fields who will be providing training in research ethics to individuals ranging from undergraduates to faculty and staff, as well as to other trainers. Registration is limited to 40 and participants are selected competitively.

PCORI UPCOMING INFORMATIONAL "TOWN HALL" WEBINARS FOR FUNDING APPLICANTS
PCORI March Newsletter, March 12, 2014

[The Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) is] hosting an applicant town hall webinar on our new Patient and Stakeholder Engagement Rubric on Thursday, March 13. In addition, we'll host webinars on our Improving Methods funding announcement on Tuesday, March 18, and on our Spring 2014 broad PFAs on Thursday, March 20. Register now on our meetings and events page.

* This is the complete news article.

MARCH 2014 WEBINAR: PRACTICING GOOD SCIENCE THROUGH ETHICAL STUDY DESIGN
By Tony Mazzaschi, AAMC, March 13, 2014

On March 19, the Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research organization will host a webinar titled “Practicing Good Science Through Ethical Study Design.” Ethical questions associated with human research studies are raised and addressed during IRB review, and many of these issues can and should be taken into consideration by the research team in the course of study design. More information: http://www.primr.org/webinars/mar2014/

* This is the complete news article.
On April 15, PRIM&R will host a webinar titled “Central IRBs: Models, Logistics, and Implications.” As the use of central IRBs continues to grow and gain widespread acceptance, research protection professionals must be educated about the different models of centralized review, the respective responsibilities of the institution and the central IRB, and the costs and benefits of this review mechanism. More information: http://www.primr.org/webinars/apr2014

* This is the complete news article.

NIH’s biomedical research workforce initiatives, which implement Advisory Committee to the Director recommendations, include improving graduate student and postdoctoral research training through a number of measures, including increasing postdoctoral stipends to reflect years of training, and considering policies on benefits. In February we announced increases to NRSA stipend levels in the NIH Guide. Today, I’d like to talk about how we are proceeding with evaluating postdoc benefits. To build a complete picture of the availability of postdoc benefits, we need to collect new data. We’ve started that process by developing and sending a survey to signing officials at institutions that supported postdocs in fiscal year 2013 and that are members of the National Council of University Research Administrators.

Senate Assistant Majority Leader Richard J. Durbin is introducing a bill that would create a mandatory, dedicated funding stream for four biomedical research agencies, trying to make up for declining rates of research funding. “America’s place as the world’s innovation leader and our future prosperity are at risk because we are no longer investing adequately in basic science,” Durbin, D-Ill., said at a Tuesday speech at the Center for National Policy. Durbin’s position in leadership as well as his membership on the Appropriations Committee likely will draw attention to the legislation. Advocates for years have been pushing for increased biomedical research money in the federal budget. The bill would provide mandatory funding of $150 billion over the next 10 years for the NIH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Defense health programs and the VA Medical and Prosthetic Research Program. Funding in the first year would be $1.8 billion, and gradually increase over 10 years, which would be above and beyond regular appropriations and the anticipated cost of living increases, Durbin said. He said that while Congress needs to do “our best” in giving the programs
sufficient discretionary funding, a mandatory fund would protect the money from “the whims of politicians.” Durbin also acknowledged that his bill would need an offset, saying, “we live in a world where you pay for these things now.” He noted that a 98-cent increase per pack in the federal tax on tobacco products would raise $77 billion over 10 years – half the cost of his proposed bill. President Barack Obama included such a tax increase in his fiscal 2015 budget proposal. Durbin said that the government’s investment in research at the NIH did not keep up with inflation between 2003 and 2012, and that the number of research grants the NIH can fund has declined every year for the past decade. Meanwhile, other countries, especially in Asia, are expanding their investment in biomedical research, Durbin said. He said that over the last decade, the United States has increased its federal investments in research and development by 4 percent a year, while China has increased its investments by 20 percent a year. “If America is going to remain the world’s leader in cutting-edge biomedical research, we must make federal funding for medical research a national priority,” Durbin said. The Senate Appropriations Committee will hold a hearing soon on government research, including biomedical research, Durbin said. He said that he approached Senate Appropriations Chairwoman and strong NIH supporter Barbara A. Mikulski, D-Md., about his idea first. Durbin is chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense. Democrats Jack Reed of Rhode Island, Sherrod Brown of Ohio, and Mazie K. Hirono of Hawaii are original co-sponsors of the bill, and Durbin said he expects more to join. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., mentioned Durbin’s bill on the floor Tuesday, and called on lawmakers to work together to increase funding for the NIH. He said that the agency’s funding has been cut over the past few years, particularly during sequestration. “The NIH is billions of dollars short in being able to maintain the place that they’ve had in years past,” said Reid. Early Tuesday, the Senate cleared by unanimous consent a bill (HR 2019) that would authorize $126 million over 10 years for NIH pediatric research grants by redirecting federal funds for national party conventions. Reid emphasized that the money would be helpful to the NIH but would still need to be appropriated through an appropriations measure. “It is so important that we not claim victory for the NIH because of this,” he said of the bill’s passage.

* This is the complete news article.

**218: CANTOR SCORES FIRST GOP REBRANDING WIN AS PEDIATRIC RESEARCH BILL SAILS THROUGH SENATE**

By Daniel Newhauser, CQ.com, March 11, 2014

Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., cheered the passage of one of his top priorities Tuesday, as a pediatric research funding bill he laboriously pushed through the House easily passed the Senate. The bill is the first piece of legislation under the umbrella of Cantor’s much-publicized Republican rebrand to pass the Senate, and his office now expects President Barack Obama to sign the bill into law. “So often everyone is focused on what Congress cannot accomplish that we overlook the good that can be done when both parties work together,” Cantor said in a statement. Of course, the road to passage was not so simple for the legislation. It moves $126 million over 10 years that would be used to pay for political conventions into a fund that can
only be applied to pediatric research through the NIH. Yet many House Republicans opposed the bill because they would rather see the money used to offset the deficit. Top Democrats, meanwhile, called the $126 million a pittance in the NIH budget and said Cantor was simply trying to obscure several years of Republican-led cuts to medical research. It was not until Cantor rebranded the bill itself that he found legislative success. The bill was renamed for Gabriella Miller, a 10-year-old Virginia girl who died last year. Afflicted with brain cancer, she nonetheless made viral YouTube videos advocating for heightened awareness for pediatric diseases. With Miller’s parents watching from the House chamber’s visitors gallery, the bill passed in December on a 295-103 vote despite objections from Democratic leaders. It passed the Senate on Tuesday with unanimous consent.

* This is the complete news article.

**TOP U.S. SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT OFFICIAL QUITS IN FRUSTRATION WITH BUREAUCRACY**

By Jocelyn Kaiser, ScienceInsider, March 12, 2014

The director of the U.S. government office that monitors scientific misconduct in biomedical research has resigned after 2 years out of frustration with the "remarkably dysfunctional" federal bureaucracy. David Wright, director of the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), writes in a scathing resignation letter obtained by ScienceInsider that the huge amount of time he spent trying to get things done made much of his time at ORI "the very worst job I have ever had." ORI, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services, monitors alleged research misconduct by researchers funded by the NIH and other Public Health Service agencies.

**TWO DEFINITIONS FOR CHRONIC MULTISYMPTOM ILLNESS AFFLICTING GULF WAR VETERANS SHOULD GUIDE VA TREATMENT AND RESEARCH**

The National Academies News Release, March 12, 2014

Two existing definitions of chronic multisymptom illness -- one by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and another from a study of Kansas Gulf War veterans -- should be used by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to guide research and treatment of Gulf War veterans, says a new report from the Institute of Medicine. Determining which definition to use in different circumstances should be based on specific needs. Furthermore, the term "Gulf War illness" should replace "chronic multisymptom illness" to reflect the group in which the illness manifests and the group's distinctive experiences, said the committee that wrote the report.

**FEDERAL BUDGET**

**THE FUTURE IS FLAT IN WHITE HOUSE'S 2015 SPENDING REQUEST**
Researchers dependent on government funding would face a flat future under the White House's $3.9 trillion budget request for the 2015 fiscal year, which begins 1 October. Overall, it calls for about $135 billion in spending on research and development. That would be a 1.2% increase over 2014 levels, but would not keep pace with the forecast inflation rate of 1.7% for 2015. The biggest civilian science funders—the NIH, the NSF, and the Department of Energy's Office of Science—would all get budget increases that would not keep pace with inflation.

A FIRST LOOK AT THE FY 2015 R&D BUDGET
By Matt Hourihan, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) R&D Budget Analysis, March 4, 2014

The President's FY 15 budget request to Congress is now available for download via the Office of Management and Budget. Agencies have also begun releasing budget information, but detailed justifications are still to be issued for most. AAAS will continue to provide updates. Some basic facts about the President's budget request:
• The budget proposes $3.9 trillion in total outlays. Of this total, roughly 63 percent is mandatory spending, and roughly 30 percent is discretionary spending (the rest is net interest - see chart at right).
• This represents continued growth in the mandatory budget relative to the discretionary budget, which accounts for most R&D. By comparison, in FY 2010, the split was 55 percent mandatory, 39 percent discretionary. In FY 1990, the split was 45 percent versus 40 percent. CBO expects this divergence to continue.
• The expected deficit is pegged at $564 billion, an improvement from last year.
• The budget matches the $1.014 trillion discretionary spending cap agreed to by Congress in December. However, the President has also proposed additional discretionary spending on top of this cap, via what's being called the "Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative." This extra spending amounts to $56 billion, split between defense and nondefense, and does include additional research and education spending.

CONGRESS SET TO IGNORE EXTRA FUNDING IN FY 2015 REQUEST
AAAS Policy Alert, March 12, 2014

In last week's budget submission, the President proposed an additional $56 billion in discretionary spending above the current spending caps, to be split between defense and nondefense, and including $5.3 billion in R&D funding. But appropriators have already dashed the Administration's hopes to revisit the discretionary spending caps during appropriations, as both House Appropriations Committee Chair Hal Rogers (R-KY) and Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) have said they would stick to the current $1.014 trillion spending limit agreed to in the December budget deal.
GAO ON AGENCY SEQUESTER RESPONSE
AAAS Policy Alert, March 12, 2014

The Government Accountability Office released a 217-page report outlining how the FY 2013 sequestration impacted federal agencies, and what steps agencies took to react to those funding cuts. For instance, the NSF ultimately enjoyed a larger-than-expected appropriation for this year to partially mitigate the number of lost grants and employed budgetary transfer authorities to avoid furloughs and keep construction projects on track.

DEFICIT DECLINES 4.4 PERCENT IN FEBRUARY, CBO SAYS
By Paul Krawzak, CQ.com, March 10, 2014

The deficit fell 23 percent in the first five months of the fiscal year, although the pace of the decline slowed in February, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The $379 billion deficit since October was $115 billion behind the red ink recorded in the October to February period the year before, CBO said, largely because of larger tax receipts and reduced spending. Growing revenue of $94 billion over the period was the largest contributor, but reduced spending also played a role as outlays fell by $21 billion. The drop in spending would have been bigger at $54 billion if not for a shift in the timing of payments because March 1 fell on a weekend. Much of the drop in spending occurred because payments from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to the Treasury were $34 billion higher than last year. Because of a re-evaluation of certain tax assets that increased its net worth, Freddie Mac made a one-time payment of $24 billion to the Treasury. The balance of increased payments was attributable to the government sponsored enterprises’ profitability. The estimated deficit for February was $195 billion, 4.4 percent less than the $204 billion deficit in February 2013. Revenue was up by $21 billion or 17.1 percent from the previous February, while outlays grew by $12 billion or 3.7 percent over last year. Over the last five months, defense spending fell by $20 billion or 8 percent, while outlays for unemployment benefits declined by $9 billion or 28 percent. Spending on Social Security and Medicaid rose by $16 billion or 5 percent and $8 billion or 8 percent, respectively.

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

WORK IN PROGRESS

A year after the Online Learning Summit was founded in Cambridge, Mass., attendees this weekend struggled to draw parallels to last year's event. The reason, they said, is that "everything has changed." Top-ranking university officials and ed-tech company executives reconvened at the University of California at Berkeley after a turbulent year for massive open online courses. During the day-and-a-half-long summit, organized by Berkeley, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Stanford University, speakers seemed to follow an everything-but-MOOCs approach to online education on campus.

**COLLEGES GET CHANCE TO AIR CONCERNS ABOUT RATINGS WITH A KEY LISTENER**

The Obama administration’s proposed rating system for colleges is clearly one of the most important issues facing higher education right now, and getting a White House nominee for a top higher-education post in a room, listening to colleges’ concerns about the ratings, was bound to be a hot ticket at the annual meeting here of the American Council on Education. Unfortunately, that ticket was so hot that ACE officials banned both the news media and some attendees from entering the room where Ted Mitchell, the nominee for U.S. under secretary of education, was listening to what speakers had to say on that subject.

**MIXED VIEWS OF HIGHER ED**

Americans with a college education are more likely than others to report a good or very good standard of living, according to a new poll of American adults. But while that’s consistent with the views of college educators about one of the benefits of attending their institutions, other responses may raise concerns for college leaders, especially at private institutions. The survey of 1,006 adults nationally was conducted by the Robert Morris University Polling Institute. The poll found that college-educated respondents were more likely (75.5 percent) than non-college educated respondents (63.6 percent) to report a good or very good financial standard of living. But only 55.9 percent of those who attended college credited their time there with their economic success -- a majority but not an overwhelming one.

**MAINTAINING QUALITY AND REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT -- COMMENTARY**
By Judith Eaton, *Roll Call*, March 11, 2014

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act provides Congress with an ideal opportunity to streamline and clarify the relationship between the federal government and accreditation, higher education’s primary means of assuring and improving quality. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation, the largest higher-education institutional membership organization in
the country and dedicated to advocacy and improvement of accreditation, believes that this is in the best interests of students and society, as well as helping accreditation to better meet the evolving expectations of Congress.

**ONE DUPONT & UNIT RECORDS**

A new report published Tuesday by the New America Foundation criticizes several higher education lobbying associations for standing in the way of a proposed federal database that would provide more expansive data about how colleges are performing. The report -- “College Blackout: How the Higher Education Lobby Fought to Keep Students in the Dark” -- outlines the history of a proposal to create a federal student-unit record system, which has been a lightning rod for controversy since it was first suggested by then-Education Secretary Margaret Spellings's higher education commission in 2005.

**REVISED ‘GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT’ RULE BREAKS LITTLE NEW GROUND**

The Education Department released a revised "gainful employment" rule late Thursday, a little less than two years after a federal judge threw out the original measure, calling portions of it "arbitrary." The new proposal hews closely to a draft version rejected by a rule-making committee in December, judging for-profit and vocational programs based on their graduates’ debt levels and their borrowers’ default rates. The cutoffs for programs to pass and fail the rule are unchanged from the draft proposal, as are the associated penalties.

**SECRETARY DUNCAN APPOINTS MEMBER TO THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND INTEGRITY**
Department of Education Press Release, March 6, 2014

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan today announced the sixth and final appointment to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI). The committee's new member, appointed to a six-year term, is: John Etchemendy, provost, Stanford University. NACIQI advises the secretary on accreditation issues and the eligibility and certification process for institutions of higher education. It is charged with recommending to the secretary which accrediting or specific state approval agencies should be recognized as reliable authorities for judging the quality of postsecondary institutions and programs.

**NSF PLANS CHANGES IN GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS, TRAINEESHIPS**
Within a 2015 budget request that is nearly flat, the NSF has proposed beefing up its signature graduate research fellowship (GRF) program and reworking its approach to graduate traineeships. The twin goals are in line with the Obama administration’s approach to training the next generation of scientists and engineers. In budget documents unveiled Monday at a media briefing, NSF officials describe their plan to raise the annual GRF stipend to $34,000 in 2015. NSF gave students a similar $2000 boost in 2013 after holding the size of the stipends steady at $30,000 for a decade. Those two increases would require an 11% hike in NSF spending on the GRF program, to $333 million. That growth points to the high status of GRF within NSF’s education directorate, which is seeking an increase of 5%. It also dwarfs the 1.2% increase for the agency as a whole.

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**IMMIGRATION**

**IMMIGRATION DOESN’T HAVE THE VOTES YET, RYAN SAYS**
By Daniel Newhauser, *Roll Call*, March 12, 2014

House Budget Chairman Paul D. Ryan told his local newspaper that Republican leaders do not have the votes yet to pass a rewrite of the nation’s immigration system. “We don’t have the votes right now,” the Wisconsin Republican told his local newspaper, the Janesville Gazette, in an interview Monday. “Right now, we’re working hard to find where that consensus lies.” Ryan said both the right and left are holding up an overhaul. A poll of House Republican offices by CQ Roll Call found that just 18 members, including Ryan, publicly support the immigration principles Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio released in January.

*This is the complete article.

**INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES**

**STRONGER OVERSIGHT IS URGED ON WORK PROGRAM FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS IN U.S.**

The federal government should do more to identify the potential risks associated with a program that allows foreign students to stay and work in the United States after they graduate, says a report released on Friday by the GAO. The program, known as Optional Practical Training, is overseen by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. It allows graduates in the United States on student visas to extend their stay temporarily in order to gain work experience related to their field of study. Sen. Charles E. Grassley, R-Iowa, asked the GAO to evaluate the program's management. The report urges the immigration agency to do more to identify potential risks associated with the program, to step up efforts to ensure that students' work is related to their area of study, and to develop ways to ascertain if students are
exceeding the program's limits. The Department of Homeland Security, of which ICE is a part, concurred with the report's recommendations.

* This is the complete news article.

**PHYSICAL SCIENCES & ENGINEERING**

**PENTAGON BOOSTING ITS PUSH FOR UNDERWATER DRONES**
By Ray Locker, *USA Today*, March 13, 2014

The Pentagon is proposing dramatic increases in spending for underwater pods to store drone submarines and a variety of other seaborne drones and surveillance technology, another example of the military's shift toward the Pacific, newly released budget documents show. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is stepping up its research on several programs, including doubling its planned spending on the Hydra program, an underwater "truck" that would carry unmanned submarines and aerial drones.

**BE AN ASTEROID HUNTER IN NASA'S FIRST ASTEROID GRAND CHALLENGE CONTEST SERIES**
NASA News Release, March 10, 2014

NASA’s Asteroid Data Hunter contest series will offer $35,000 in awards over the next six months to citizen scientists who develop improved algorithms that can be used to identify asteroids. This contest series is being conducted in partnership with Planetary Resources Inc. of Bellevue, Wash. The first contest in the series will kick off on March 17. Prior to the kick off, competitors can create an account on the contest series website and learn more about the rules and different phases of the contest series by going to: http://bit.ly/AsteroidHunters

**ENGINEERING FOR YOU VIDEO CONTEST**
National Academy of Engineering, March 10, 2014

The National Academy of Engineering wants to know how engineering impacts YOU! Enter the Engineering for You (E4U) Video Contest and tell us how engineering creations serve the welfare of humanity and the needs of society. We are offering a $25,000 prize to the most inspiring 1-2 minute video that highlights engineering achievements of the past, present or future. There’s also a “People’s Choice Award” of $5,000 and the top videos in each competition category are eligible for a prize of up to $5,000. We hope that you will participate in the contest and also encourage those in your local communities to participate! The deadline to enter is March 31, so start filming! Learn more at www.e4uvideocontest.org.

* This is the complete announcement.
2014 NATIONAL NANOTECHNOLOGY STRATEGIC PLAN
AAAS Policy Alert, March 12, 2014

On February 28th, the National Science and Technology Council released the 2014 National Nanotechnology Initiative Strategic Plan, which is the framework that underpins the nanotechnology work of the National Nanotechnology Initiative agencies. It aims to ensure that advancements in and applications of nanotechnology continue while addressing potential concerns about future and existing applications.

* This is the complete news article.

CRITICAL TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR ADVANCING BIG DATA SCIENCE & ENGINEERING (BIGDATA)
NSF Program Solicitation, March 13, 2014

Full Proposal Deadline(s) (due by 5 p.m. proposer's local time): June 09, 2014. This year, the solicitation invites two types of proposals: "Foundations" (F): those developing or studying fundamental techniques, theories, methodologies, and technologies of broad applicability to Big Data problems; and "Innovative Applications" (IA): those developing techniques, methodologies and technologies of key importance to a Big Data problem directly impacting at least one specific application. All proposals must address critical challenges for big data management, big data analytics, or scientific discovery processes impacted by big data. These techniques, methodologies and technologies can be computational, statistical, or mathematical in nature, and proposals may focus on novel theoretical analysis or experimental evaluation of these techniques and methodologies. A high level of innovation is expected in all proposals. Proposals in all areas of science and engineering covered by participating directorates at NSF are welcome. This solicitation is a part of a larger national "Big Data Initiative", which covers a wide range of topics: big data infrastructure; education and workforce development; and multi-disciplinary collaborative teams and communities that address complex scientific, biomedical and engineering grand challenges.

PCAST NOMINATIONS FOR NATIONAL LABS PANEL DUE
By Alex Guillen, Politico’s Morning Energy, March 14, 2014

The President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology [PCAST] has until tomorrow to nominate at least 18 people for a special "independent commission" whose mission is to review "effectiveness" of the Energy Department's national labs. The recommendations will go to Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, who has until May 1 to decide which nine nominees to keep. Among the commission's duties is to assess whether the labs are "appropriately sized," are "not
unnecessarily redundant and duplicative" and whether consolidation might help in certain situations. The panel's findings are ultimately due by February 15, 2015.

* This is the complete news article.

**SUBMISSION OF I/UCRC PROPOSALS IN RESPONSE TO NSF 13-594 IN AREAS RELATED TO ENGINEERING BIOLOGY AND CELLULAR BIOMANUFACTURING**

NSF Dear Colleague, March 13, 2014

The NSF University Cooperative Research Centers (I/UCRC) Program has over a 30-year history of fostering long-term partnerships among industry, academe and government in various technology sectors. These partnerships develop through the cooperative execution of precompetitive research that strengthens the ecosystem for open innovation and U.S. competitiveness. Sector precompetitive research addresses application-inspired fundamental topics that are longer term, recognized challenges to the industry sector as a whole such that industry members benefit from collaboration in the research definition and execution. NSF provides catalyzing investment to these centers, which are primarily supported by industrial members and other stakeholders. The research carried out at each center is of interest to both the industry members and the center faculty. I/UCRCs contribute to the nation's research infrastructure base and enhance the intellectual capacity of the engineering and science workforce through the integration of research and education. As appropriate, I/UCRCs use international collaborations to advance these goals within the global context. In emerging areas of technology at the interface between fields such as the engineering of biology and cellular biomanufacturing, including the field of synthetic biology, there is an even greater need for collaborative precompetitive research that will ensure the success of these nascent technology areas. In particular, research that contributes to the establishment of standards for production; provides tools for the assessment of quality, robustness and stability of the process and product; and develops metrics that will facilitate risk assessment associated with a regulatory framework, will be essential for the eventual commercialization of products from the engineering of biology. The I/UCRC model in which industry members pool and apply their funds to center projects that address shared research challenges can be enabling to such nascent fields by leveraging the investment and reducing the risk for each participating member organization.

**RESEARCH POLICY**

**FIRST BILL DRAWS EARLY OPPOSITION**


University groups and Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives have begun to weigh in on a legislative proposal by Republicans to reshape a major chunk of the U.S. government's...
science funding enterprise -- and so far there's a lot of skepticism. The House science panel's ranking Democrat, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Texas, yesterday issued her own press release, calling FIRST a "missed opportunity" and touting her own version of the legislation, the America Competes Reauthorization Act of 2014. The Association of American Universities (AAU), composed of 60 major U.S. research universities, and two in Canada, also says FIRST falls short and will oppose the legislation.

AAU STATEMENT ON INTRODUCTION OF FIRST ACT
AAU News Release, March 11, 2014

The original COMPETES Act established a vision for revitalizing the nation’s research and innovation enterprise. The new FIRST Act does not live up to that vision. The legislation fails to meet the guiding principles for reauthorization of the COMPETES Act endorsed last year by the business, scientific, and higher education communities. Among the most important of those principles is to set funding targets for the NSF and the National Institutes of Standards and Technology that permit real growth for these agencies to stimulate long-term economic prosperity. The proposed legislation does not even keep pace with inflation for these agencies, whose work is critical to our future national competitiveness. For this reason alone, the bill does little to close this nation’s innovation deficit, but it also does some things to widen it, including significant funding cuts to social, behavioral and economic research.

RESEARCH TRENDS

NEW STRATEGIC PLAN GUIDES NSF THROUGH 2018
NSF Press Release, March 13, 2014

The NSF has released a new strategic plan in concert with the President's Budget Request to Congress for NSF in fiscal year 2015. The plan, titled, "Investing in Science, Engineering and Education for the Nation's Future," sets goals to guide the agency through 2018. This is the first year that all federal agencies were required to simultaneously submit revised strategic plans to Congress, covering the next four years, under the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010. NSF's plan sets out three strategic goals, each of which encompasses two or more objectives:

- **Transform the Frontiers of Science and Engineering.** Invest in fundamental research to ensure significant continuing advances across science, engineering, and education. Integrate education and research to support development of a diverse STEM workforce with cutting-edge capabilities. Provide world-class research infrastructure to enable major scientific advances.
- **Stimulate Innovation and Address Societal Needs through Research and Education.** Strengthen the links between fundamental research and societal needs through investments and partnerships. Build the capacity of the nation to address societal
challenges using a suite of formal, informal, and broadly available STEM educational mechanisms.

- *Excel as a Federal Science Agency.* Build an increasingly diverse, engaged, and high-performing workforce by fostering excellence in recruitment, training, leadership, and management of human capital. Use effective methods and innovative solutions to achieve excellence in accomplishing the agency's mission.

**SEXUAL ASSAULT POLICY**

**FEDS INVESTIGATE HANDLING OF 3RD SEXUAL ABUSE COMPLAINT AT MICHIGAN STATE**

Federal investigators are reviewing how another sexual abuse complaint was handled at MSU, bringing the total number of cases under review at the East Lansing school to three, university officials confirmed Tuesday.

**SOCIAL SCIENCES, THE ARTS & THE HUMANITIES**

**YOUTH VIOLENCE: OPPORTUNITY FOR BREAKTHROUGHS IN FUNDAMENTAL BASIC RESEARCH**
NSF Dear Colleague, March 12, 2014

This letter is to alert all basic social and behavioral science research communities of the NSF’s interest in receipt of proposals that will enable a better understanding of the contributing factors, causes, and consequences of violence perpetrated by and against youth. This will advance the Foundation's goal to provide scientific evidence in support of important social issues. The interest spans both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. NSF is interested in a wide range of approaches to investigating these issues. Proposals that investigate at the level of individual, family, school, community, and/or culture are encouraged. Topics of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Characteristics of youth at risk for violence and their family and community structures
- Impact of exposure to domestic, community, and media violence
- Positive and negative influences of social interactions, social norms, and group processes
- Biological, neural, environmental, and developmental risk/protective factors
- Organizational processes, institutional structures, and social policies that influence and are influenced by the perception and management of violent incidents
- Roles for technology and engineering in minimizing incidence and impact of youth violence.

**HOW TO APPLY FOR THE AMTRAK RESIDENCY FOR WRITERS**
Amtrak News Release, March 8, 2014

What began as a line in Alexander Chee’s interview in PEN Ten and was fueled by Twitter, is now an official Amtrak program...Today we are happy to announce that #AmtrakResidency will allow for up to 24 writers to take long-distance trains to work on their projects. Each writer’s round-trip journey will include accommodations on board a sleeper car equipped with a bed, a desk and outlets. We hope this experience will inspire creativity and most importantly fuel your sense of adventure! Are you excited about #AmtrakResidency? Want to learn more and apply? Head over to our official entry form and good luck!

STUDENT AID

ANOTHER PUSH FOR DEBIT CARD RULES
By Michael Stratford, Inside Higher Ed, March 12, 2014

The Department of Education’s Office of Inspector General on Tuesday became the latest federal investigator calling for stricter rules on the debit cards offered to college students to gain access to financial aid funds. In a report, the inspector general’s office said the department should enact new rules on colleges entering into agreements with financial institutions or other companies to provide debit cards on campus.

DEBT MANAGEMENT DISARRAY
By Michael Stratford, Inside Higher Ed, March 13, 2014

Congressional investigators have found “serious weaknesses” in how the Education Department manages a program meant to help defaulted borrowers get their loans back on track, a GAO official said on Wednesday. Melissa Emrey-Arras, who oversees education issues at the GAO, told a House panel that the department’s failure to properly oversee a 2011 computer system upgrade was largely responsible for delays that tens of thousands of borrowers experienced in trying to get their loans out of default.