Congress Set for FY 2005 Budget Conference

On March 25, the House of Representatives passed its budget resolution (H. Con. Res. 393) by a vote of 215 to 212. The leadership was able to round up enough votes for passage by promising deficit hawks a vote on the budget enforcement bill (H. R. 3973) before the Memorial Day recess. (See WIR #6, 3/23/04, for details.)

A mixed group of 10 Republicans voted against the resolution, including conservatives who think the bill spends too much; moderates who think the bill spends too little; and others who think the budget enforcement provisions should have been included in the resolution, not in separate legislation.

NAICU's conference issues

NAICU's big issue in conference is keeping the $8.7 billion reserve fund for student aid, passed by the Senate. It would create a $5 billion reserve fund for changes to the student loan programs in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), and a $3.7 billion reserve fund to eliminate the Pell Grant shortfall. The House resolution does not include these reserve funds.

The NAICU Budget Action Team—a group of presidents who are constituents of the budget committee members—has been activated to contact their representatives about keeping the reserve fund in the final budget. We hope you will support them by asking your senators and representatives to support the $8.7 billion for college students.

The $8.7 billion student aid reserve fund in the Senate budget resolution brings together many of our top priorities. If the education committees can get $5 billion to make changes to the student loan programs, it could give them the impetus they need to get the HEA reauthorization done this year. If the appropriations committees are able to pay off the Pell Grant shortfall, a huge obstacle to increasing the Pell Grant maximum award will be removed.

Asking Congress to keep the $8.7 billion reserve fund for student aid in the budget is one of the most important calls you can make this year.

Next steps

The House and Senate Budget Committees will meet as a conference committee the week of March 29. The difficult part of this conference will not be agreeing to spending levels—the two resolutions are very close on total spending, and very close to the president’s request. The sticking point for conference is the inclusion of budget enforcement provisions in the Senate resolution that require pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) rules for tax cuts. The House resolution does not include this, and the House budget enforcement legislation only includes PAYGO for entitlement spending programs, not tax cuts. Senate moderates supported the resolution because it included this tough rule for tax cuts, which is strongly opposed by the House leadership. The rift between chambers and among Republicans may prove tough to mend.

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For more information, please contact Stephanie Giesecke at NAICU (202) 785-8866 or stephanie@naicu.edu.
On March 10, the Education Department opened the spring data collection for its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS). The spring collection includes surveys on Graduation Rates, Student Financial Aid, Finance, and Enrollment. The spring collection will remain open through April 21 for institutions, although the Education Department encourages institutional representatives to begin submitting their information as soon as possible.

Institutions must submit IPEDS data to the department to participate in the federal Title IV student financial aid programs. Failure to provide IPEDS data in a timely manner will likely trigger action by the department, beginning with a review of compliance with other Title IV requirements.

Last year, the Education Department sent warning letters to 470 institutions that did not fully complete the IPEDS surveys. In addition, the department fined several institutions $10,000 or more.

For further information on the IPEDS data collection, visit the data collection Web site at http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/webbase.asp; contact the IPEDS Help Desk at the toll-free number, (877) 225-2568; or e-mail ipedshelp@rti.org.

For more information, contact Elise Miller at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or elise@naicu.edu.

On March 3, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) added information on graduation rates to its College Opportunities On-Line (COOL) Web site. The COOL Web site was created following the 1998 Higher Education Act amendments, which required NCES to provide information about tuition and fees and financial aid to students and families.

This is the first time that graduation rates have been made publicly available in this fashion. Included are four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates by gender and ethnicity. It is possible to search institutions by an array of criteria, and to compare your institution’s graduation rates with those of its peers.

The information is at the individual institutional level, along with other data on enrollment, tuition and fee charges, crime rates, and financial aid that are collected from institutions through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS) surveys. Submission of IPEDS data is required by the Education Department for institutions to participate in the federal Title IV student financial aid programs.

To visit the COOL Web site, go to http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool. For more information, contact Elise Miller at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or elise@naicu.edu.