

Washington Update – 25 September 2008

FY 2009 Appropriations

With scheduled adjournment just two days away, Congress will need to move quickly to approve a continuing resolution (CR) to keep the government running into the new fiscal year, which begins on Oct. 1. The only FY09 spending bills likely to pass before the deadline are those having to do with defense and homeland security. Numerous scenarios have been discussed regarding funding levels and the length of the CR, and it is still unclear what the final bill will hold. In all likelihood, it will freeze discretionary spending at the current FY08 levels – this means that many agencies will see continued flat budgets. Speculation about the length of the CR runs from a short one ending in November, to a six-month CR, expiring in March. The latter is likely. The CR could be brought to the floor as early as tomorrow (Wednesday) with a separate economic stimulus bill brought forward later in the week.

As you know (thank you to those who contacted your representative last week), a bipartisan group of 29 House Members, led by Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI), sent a letter to House leaders and leaders of the Appropriations Committee urging them to provide increased funding for several science agencies “in any future appropriations bill considered by the 110th Congress.” However, the current focus is on the financial crisis and emergency spending; there is no supplemental funding for science agencies in the draft CR.

FY 2010 Appropriations

Agencies have been developing their FY 2010 budgets. If elected, Senator McCain has pledged to impose a one-year freeze on domestic discretionary funding for FY 2010, subjecting all programs to a thorough review. In that scenario, NSF would again be funded at \$6 billion, just two percent over FY07 (the last boost NSF received was in FY06, with a six percent increase). NOAA would hold at \$3.9 billion, its sixth year at this level. But no matter who the next president is, the bailout that has been proposed to address the country’s financial crisis is certain to squeeze all spending dramatically. Just to put things into perspective, the proposed bailout is almost the size of what this country has spent on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars since 2001, and will raise the national debt to close to \$10 trillion if all \$700 billion is committed.

NOAA Administrator to Retire October 31

Retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator, has announced his resignation, effective Oct. 31. Lautenbacher served as NOAA’s eighth Administrator for nearly seven years. On his departure his deputy administrator, William J. Brennan, will become acting administrator (see <http://www.noaa.gov/brennan.html>).

Science Debate 2008

Last year, over 38,000 scientists, engineers and others signed up to Science Debate 2008, an effort to advance science and innovation in the political dialogue. Over 3,400 questions were submitted to the presidential candidates, regarding science policy, and the list was pared down to 14. Both the McCain and Obama campaigns have provided their answers; below is a summary of their responses to seven questions of relevance to the UCAR community. A side-by-side comparison of the candidates’ responses to all 14 questions is available on the Science Debate 2008 web site at <http://www.sciencedebate2008.com/>. Keep in mind that these answers were provided before the recent financial crisis, the extraordinary pressures of which could surely cause considerable delay in the new Administration advancing these proposals.

Keep scrolling for the questionnaire summary...

Question	Barack Obama's Answer	John McCain's Answer
<p>Innovation: What policies will you support to ensure America remains the world leader in innovation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will double basic research budgets over the next decade. • Will increase research grants for early career researchers. • Will increase support for high-risk, high-payoff research. • Will support strong science curriculum at all grade levels. • Will launch a Service Scholarship program, paying under and graduate teaching education costs to those committing to teach high school. • Will create Teacher Residency Academies, adding 30K new teachers to high-need schools. • Will increase NSF graduate fellowships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will appoint a Science Advisor who will ensure policies will be based on sound science and that scientific integrity is restored. • Will eliminate earmarks in order to allocate funds for S&T investments. • Will fund research in nanotechnology, biotechnology and IT. • Will improve scientific and engineering management within the government. • Will promote exploration agenda taking US to the Moon, Mars and beyond.
<p>Climate Change: What is your position on various proposed measures and policies to address it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal: to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050 • Immediate goal: to reduce emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. • Will reengage with the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change. • Will create a Global Energy Forum (G8+5 developing nations) • Will create a Tech Transfer program to export technologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2012, will seek return to 2005 levels; by 2020, return to 1990 levels; by 2050, reduction of 60% below 1990 levels. • Mileage requirements: Will strengthen penalties for violating CAFÉ standards. • Will establish a permanent R&D tax credit • Will invest \$2 billion annually for 15 years on clean coal technologies • Clean Car Challenge to automakers – zero-emission cars • Will support USGCRP.
<p>Education: What role should the government play in K-12 math and science education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will establish a STEM Education Committee within OSTP to coordinate efforts of agencies • Will consolidate STEM-ed initiatives within Dept. of Education • Will create a State Consortium for STEM education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will provide funding for professional teacher development • Will commit 60% of Title II funding for incentive bonuses to math and science teachers to locate to most challenging settings. • Will provide \$250M grant program to expand online opportunities. • Will support STEM-ed programs at NSF, DOE, NASA and NOAA.
<p>Ocean Health: What steps should the US take to protect ocean health?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will support expanded research programs at NOAA, NSF and USGS. • Will promote stronger research collaboration across US and international agencies • Will work to ratify the Law of the Sea Convention • Will strengthen and reauthorize the Coastal Zone Management, National Marine Sanctuaries and the Oceans and Human Health Acts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The field of ocean science and engineering needs more attention and focus. Need better scientific understanding of the oceans, of the interaction of climate change and the oceans, and of the ocean's role in the carbon cycle.

Question	Barack Obama's Answer	John McCain's Answer
<p>Space: How would you prioritize space in your administration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A revitalized NASA must include international and private sector partners. • Will reestablish the National Aeronautics and Space Council to oversee the entire government's space-related programs <p>[In Obama's space policy, he also lists speeding up next generation shuttle development, completing the Space Station, supporting human and robotics missions, supporting space-based observatories, launching the Global Precipitation Measurement mission, using the Decadal Survey to guide his decisions for Earth observations, supporting the Landsat Data Continuity mission, strengthening aeronautics research with a focus on aviation safety, and enhancing NASA education programs.]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have a balanced space program and proper management controls. • Will suspend decommissioning of the space shuttle until Ares/Orion replacement vehicle is in service. • Will fund NASA Constellation program • Complete construction of ISS and maximize research capability and its commercialization possibilities. • Will maintain infrastructure investments in Earth-monitoring satellites and support systems • Will prevent earmarks diverting resources from scientific research • Will ensure adequate investments in aeronautics research.
<p>Scientific Integrity: How will you balance scientific information with politics and personal beliefs in your decision-making?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will appoint people with strong science and technology backgrounds. • Will establish the first Chief Technology Officer. • Will strengthen the role of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) • Will restore integrity and transparency by an Executive Order establishing clear guidelines for the review/release of government publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will appoint a science and technology advisor within OSTP as an office within the White House structure – will restore OSTP credibility. • Will make early appointments of the science advisor and at least four assistant directors within OSTP.
<p>Research: Given that the next Congress will likely face spending constraints, what priority would you give to investment in basic research in upcoming budgets?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will increase funding for basic research in physical and life sciences, mathematics and engineering at a rate that would double basic research budgets over the next decade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will continue to support increased funding for DOE, NSF and NIH, and ensure the funding is properly managed and that the nation's research needs are adequately addressed.