Note: Watch for AAAS’s Election Update summarizing key election outcomes later this week, sent by separate e-mail to AAAS members.

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BUDGET NEWS

Report: Government Has Options to Mitigate Sequestration’s Impacts. A new report from OMB Watch, a nongovernmental transparency and accountability organization covering the White House Office of Management and Budget in particular, outlines a variety of managerial steps that the executive branch could take, without needing legislative approval, to temporarily soften the blow of sequestration. The report argues that even if the $109 billion in cuts should take effect early next year, the White House would be able to use its apportionment authority to temporarily accelerate program spending, delay the announcement of new federal grants and contracts, and pursue other administrative steps that would feasibly reduce the impact of sequestration for several weeks. Such steps could give policymakers additional time to find a legislative solution, the report argues.

Treasury Warns of Looming Debt Ceiling (Again). Last week the Treasury Department said the United States will likely reach the current borrowing limit of $16.4 trillion by the end of 2012. Treasury said it would employ "extraordinary measures" to buy additional time, extending the situation into early 2013. Similar steps were taken last year to give Congress time to negotiate the previous debt-ceiling deal. That deal, reached in August 2011, added more than $2 trillion to the federal borrowing limit and put in place the
sequestration. The approaching debt ceiling adds another ticking-clock element to ongoing negotiations to delay or avoid the sequestration. According to Congressional Budget Office estimates, the federal debt stands at roughly three-quarters of the annual gross domestic product (GDP).

For updates on the federal research and development budget for FY 2013 and the recently released AAAS sequestration report, please visit the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy website.

OTHER CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

House Democrats Request Climate Change Hearing. Representatives Henry Waxman (D-CA) and Bobby Rush (D-IL) have sent a letter to Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI), Chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, and to Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-KY), Chair of that committee's Energy and Power Subcommittee, requesting a committee hearing on climate change, with a focus on the recent superstorm Sandy. In the letter, Waxman and Rush note that they have requested hearings on climate change from these committees 17 times without success (press release and link to the letter found here).

Comment on the above item. Policy Alert blog entries are located on AAAS's MemberCentral. Once you are logged in, click on "Blogs" and look for "Capitol Connection" in the drop-down list.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

NIH Director Introduces New Blog. National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Francis Collins debuted his new NIH Director's Blog last week. The blog, he wrote, is designed to "highlight new discoveries in biology and medicine that I think are game changers, noteworthy, or just plain cool." Posts so far have featured video from a recent "Celebration of Science" event held at NIH and information about the Human Connectome Project, an NIH-funded project created to map the brain's neural connections.

ELSEWHERE

Non-Profits Push for More Collaborative Weather Research. The National Academies held a Congressional briefing in September for their recent report, Weather Services for the Nation: Becoming Second to None. During the briefing, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) proposed the formation of a National Weather Commission that would facilitate public-private partnerships and encourage better collaboration among scientists. On Oct. 31, UCAR launched a message board to "facilitate dialogue and open sharing of ideas and views," and to help them identify appropriate goals and scope of the proposed commission. Interested parties can submit their comments here.
Bipartisan Group Issues Report on Climate Change and Security. The bipartisan organization American Security Project (ASP) issued a Climate Security Report to highlight the challenges that a changing climate will present for domestic and global security (link to report release and the report itself here). The report was written for the incoming Administration and discusses strategic planning for three contingencies: Climate Change and Security; Climate Change and the Global Security; and Climate Change and the Homeland. It states that “Climate change poses a clear and present danger to the United States through its effects on our global allies as well as its direct effects on our agriculture, infrastructure, economy, and public health." The ASP Board of Directors is chaired by former Senator Gary Hart (D-CO) and includes members such as former Senator Warren Rudman (R-NH), Senator John Kerry (D-MA), and former Governor Christine Todd Whitman (R-NJ).

U.N. Develops Global Framework for Climate Services. In its first-ever "extraordinary session," the United Nations World Meteorological Organization put together a framework for global climate predictions to guide predictions used by policy makers and the general public for crop production, infrastructure planning, and disease management. Its goals are to help people understand the strengths and weaknesses of climate modeling tools, and to effectively scale global predictions into regional decision-making. For additional information, see the pre-meeting press release, the draft plan (PDF), and a post-meeting news account.

U.K. Research Fund Makes Second Round of Awards. The U.K. Research Partnership Investment Fund, established earlier this year with £100 million ($US 160 million), has expanded to £300 million and made a second round of awards (press release here). The fund is designed to support investment in higher education research facilities. Each award must be matched by at least twice as much from non-public sources. Fourteen awards, worth £220 million, have now been made. The fund intends to announce a third call for bids for the remaining £80 million. The fund will run for three years. General information about the fund can be found here.

TWAS Undergoes Another Name Change. The organization founded as the Third World Academy of Sciences, and more recently known as TWAS, The Academy of Sciences of the Developing World, has changed its name to The World Academy of Sciences. TWAS members adopted the change at their 23rd General Meeting in Tianjin, China, earlier this year (announcement and background information here). The purpose of the organization, the advancement of science in developing countries, remains the same.

Qatar Announces National Research Strategy. Qatar has announced a national research strategy to put into action its plans to transition to a knowledge-based economy. The strategy stresses five national priority areas: energy and environment; information and computing technology; health and related life sciences and technologies; social sciences, arts and humanities; and enterprise-wide interdisciplinary R&D. A major challenge for the country is developing an adequate STEM workforce; Qatar currently has only about 1,000 scientists. Further information can be found here.

Science Journalists Form Virtual Newsroom for Africa and Middle East. The World Federation of Science Journalists (WFSJ) has launched the world's first virtual science newsroom as an experimental initiative to support the development of science journalism in Africa and the Middle East. The virtual newsroom will initially run for the next two months, after which the WFSJ will decide on whether to develop it further. Journalists selected to participate will have their work mentored by "eight editors from different
science media platforms in Africa and the Middle East, [who] will commission, edit, and publish their work on their platforms." Additional information can be found [here](http://www.aaas.org/spp/policyalert).

Archived issues of *AAAS Policy Alert* can be found at [http://www.aaas.org/spp/policyalert](http://www.aaas.org/spp/policyalert).

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NOTE: The AAAS Policy Alert is a newsletter provided to AAAS Members to inform them of developments in science and technology policy that may be of interest. Information in the Policy Alert is gathered from published news reports, unpublished documents, and personal communications. Although the information contained in this newsletter is regarded as reliable, it is provided only for the convenience and private use of our members. Comments and suggestions regarding the Policy Alert are welcome. Please write to [alert@aaas.org](mailto:alert@aaas.org).