

Legislative Updates of interest for Higher Education

Week of February 12-16, 2007:

In the House – Work on the state’s FY 2007-08 Budget continues. A subcommittee of Ways and Means met Tuesday to consider budget proviso recommendations. Of interest for higher education, the subcommittee adopted a proviso to limit tuition increases at public institutions for in-state undergraduates to the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) of the previous year. HEPI is at 5% for 2006. The Ways and Means Committee is scheduled to meet at 10:00 a.m. on February 20, to begin budget deliberations. On a related issue, the House voted Thursday to send legislation (H.3295) to the Senate that would limit the growth of state spending to the lesser of 6% or the rate of population growth plus inflation. Under the legislation, monies above the limitation would be put in savings accounts and could be used on infrastructure projects, schools, school buses, natural disasters, and one-time tax cuts.

Regarding other legislation, a bill to watch was H.3170, which provides incentives for Palmetto Fellows and LIFE students majoring in science or mathematics. On Wednesday, amendments were adopted including 1) a Ways and Means amendment to provide credit for performance on AP examinations in science and/or math towards the minimum hours required in the freshman year; 2) a floor amendment to increase the book allowance for HOPE from \$150 to \$300 and to extend HOPE for a second year for students who had received HOPE in the first year and are majoring in the sciences/math areas as defined for the Palmetto Fellows and LIFE enhancement; 3) a floor amendment to add science education and math education majors as eligible for the enhancement and to require CHE to notify high school guidance counselors annually regarding the list of majors considered; and 4) a floor amendment to increase the Palmetto Fellows award in the sophomore, junior and senior year to \$7500 for those Palmetto Fellows recipients who are not receiving the additional enhancement for majoring in math or sciences. This bill received its third reading on Thursday and was sent to the Senate where it was introduced and referred to Senate Education. Other bills discussed in subcommittee meetings included H.3476, which provides for an alternative teacher certification method. The Higher Education Subcommittee of House Education and Public Works adjourned debate on this bill and will continue discussions on Wednesday, February 21, where it will also reconsider H.3162 relating to the Teacher Loan Program. New legislation introduced included a bill to provide incentives to HOPE and Need-based grant students majoring in sciences and math areas (H.3503) and a bill to include technical college presidents as officials applicable under the Agency Head Salary Commission.

In the Senate – Senate Finance met on Tuesday and received a favorable subcommittee report with amendments on S.322 that provides for the creation of a college tuition assistance program for National Guard members and closes the National Guard Loan Repayment program to new participants. The Committee reported the bill out favorably as amended and the bill is awaiting second reading. Senate Education met on Tuesday. They voted to give favorable reports to several bills including S.321 relating to the use bond funds posted by licensed nonpublic postsecondary institutions and an exemption for seasonal/temporary recruitment activities, and S.75 relating to the tuition prepayment program’s ending participation to new enrollees. The Committee voted to carry over S.7 relating to LIFE scholarships and home school students. S.243, the Hydrogen Infrastructure Development Act, received its third reading and was sent to the House. New legislation was introduced relating to USC and Clemson athletic facilities revenue bond limits. Senator Scott Richardson, District 46, resigned his seat upon Senate confirmation of his appointment by the Governor as SC Department of Insurance Director. Senator Richardson served on a number of committees including Finance and Education, and the higher education subcommittee of those committees. He resigned from the Senate on Thursday to accept his appointment.