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State and Federal Relations: 2015 Wrap Up and A Look Ahead at 2016 [1]

January 7, 2016 by Natalie Barry [2]

State Update:

The State Relations team has continued to cultivate relationships with legislators and promote the endeavors of each of the CU campuses through tours, meetings and outreach activities in legislative districts. This work is critical to our efforts during the 2016 state session, which convened on Wednesday, January 13. CU's legislative priorities this year will continue to be targeted towards efficiencies and cost savings for the university, including capital construction thresholds and bond ratings. Additionally, in collaboration with CU Vice President and Chief Financial Officer,Todd Saliman, we are actively engaged in discussions on potential modifications to the state budget which would help alleviate cuts to higher education.

Looking ahead to 2016, we have focused on the Governor's Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-2017 Budget Proposal. Below are a few highlights:

State Funding Initiatives:

- The proposed budget for higher education reflects a proposed $20 million statewide cut. CU's share of that cut would be about $4 million.
- Because the state budget includes a reduction, the Governor is recommending tuition setting authority be retained by higher education governing boards, including the CU Board of Regents, and not be limited by state law or Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) policy.
- No funding for new construction projects. The request funds continuation projects (of which CU has none in FY 2016-17) and only a portion of what is needed to pay for the most critical controlled maintenance projects throughout the state.
- No change in state funding for financial aid.

Capital Initiatives:

CU's FY2016 top system capital priorities are listed below by CU's priority ranking. Both the Governor and CCHE ranked CU's projects high on the statewide list, however, since no state funding was recommended for new projects, none of the CU priorities are funded in the Governor's budget request.

- CU Anschutz Medical Campus Interdisciplinary Building 1 ($22.8M state fund request)
- CU-Boulder Aerospace Engineering Sciences ($4.8M state fund request)
- UCCS Engineering and Applied Sciences Building Renovation ($7.5M state fund request)

- CU Denver Engineering & Physical Sciences Building/Renovation ($45.1M state fund request)

Federal Update:

Before Congress gaveled the end of their legislative business for 2015, it sent a number of key pieces of legislation to President Obama for his signature. Among the bills signed into law in December were a long-term surface transportation bill and tax extenders legislation, which included a number of provisions important to the CU community. Perhaps most importantly, Congress passed an omnibus spending package, known as the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, which will fund the federal government and its agencies for the remainder of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 through September 30, 2016. The highlights of the spending package include robust funding for a number of key federal financial aid programs, including increases to the Pell Grant program. The package also included increased funding for several federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutions of Health (NIH), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). These increases are vital to CU and its campuses, which brought in over $568 million in federally-sponsored research in FY2014-15.

Looking ahead at 2016, our federal team will continue to monitor a number of important legislative efforts already underway, including the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the America COMPETES Act reauthorization, and the 21st Century Cures Act, all of which are important to CU's academic, research, and clinical missions. In addition to tracking these legislative efforts, our office will weigh in on annual appropriations with Colorado's congressional delegation as we gear up for FY2017, which begins on October 1, 2016.

2016 is not only expected to be a busy year on the legislative side of things, but politically as well given the upcoming elections in November. On the ballot this year we will have a number of races to keep an eye on, including an open presidential race, a U.S. Senate race here in Colorado with Senator Michael Bennet running for re-election as well as the traditional U.S. House races across the state. Given Colorado's reputation as a national bell-weather state, we expect a flurry of political activity across Colorado, which could include events, rallies, etc. on our various campuses throughout the year.

As an important reminder, should there be any questions related to CU personnel involvement in political campaigns, please see the Guidelines on Campaign-Related Activities by Members of the University Community [3]or please contact the Office of Government Relations at (303) 831-6192.

federal [4]
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