

AAG Washington Monitor

Treasury Department Revises Collaborative Work Guidelines

As reported in the September AAG *Newsletter*, the U.S. Treasury Department adopted a position in April 2004 that appeared to prohibit the publication of collaborative work (i.e., editing and peer review) involving scholars from Cuba, Iran, and Sudan, all nations subject to U.S. trade embargoes. This position, spelled out in a statement by the department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), had raised serious concerns as a potential violation of scientific freedom. The AAG joined with other organizations to oppose this position and on December 15 OFAC revised its rule easing the concerns of the scientific community.

"The new rule enables U.S. persons to freely engage in most ordinary publishing activities with persons in Cuba, Iran, and Sudan, while maintaining restrictions on certain interactions with the governments . . . of those countries," asserted a statement released by the Treasury Department. OFAC's Director, Robert Werner, further noted that "This rule provides clarity and promotes important policies aimed at the free exchange of ideas without undermining the national security objectives of these country sanctions."

Lewis Tapped to Head House Appropriations

On January 5, the House leadership appointed Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA) to chair the powerful Appropriations Committee. The position was vacant due to term limits imposed on former Chairman C.W. Bill Young (R-FL). Lewis had been serving as Chair of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee.

Lewis's selection could be good news for the geography community. The fourteen-term member represents California's sprawling 41st District and makes his home in Redlands, also the location of the Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. headquarters. ESRI, is one

of the nation's leading GIS and mapping software companies and 1,500 of its 2,800 employees are based in Lewis's district and hometown. As a result, Lewis understands many of the issues affecting the geography community and is cognizant of the importance of geographic education. He is also knowledgeable about GIS and its expanding use as a geographic management system.

The appropriations chairman has very significant influence over federal spending decisions. However, Lewis will face pressure from the House leadership to toe the party line on funding. The White House has promised to rein in federal spending during President Bush's second term in office.

Hearings Announced on Tsunami-Warning Network

In reaction to the tsunami tragedy, subcommittees in both houses of Congress have announced that they will examine the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) tsunami warning system and investigate why there were no warnings given to the Asian and African nations ravaged by the December 26 killer waves. Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Chair of the Senate Oceans, Fisheries, and Coast Guard Commerce Subcommittee, first wrote to NOAA Administrator Conrad Lautenbacher, Jr. on December 29 asking why nothing was done to inform the nations of the impending crisis.

In response to these inquiries, NOAA officials have made clear that while they possess significant capacity to detect Pacific Ocean tsunamis, such capability doesn't exist for the affected areas of the Indian Ocean. Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) has accordingly proposed legislation that would expand the agency's warning system.

The tsunami crisis is likely to remain a hot topic on Capitol Hill in the coming months.

Spellings Approved as New Secretary of Education

On January 6, after a feel-good confirmation hearing, Margaret Spellings, President Bush's choice to be the next Secretary of Education, was approved 20-0 by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. She was also confirmed by the full Senate on Inauguration Day. Most of the senators at the hearing, including former Education Secretary Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and several Democrats led by Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY), took time to complement Spellings for her longtime commitment to children and education policy. Spellings most recently served as head of the White House Domestic Policy office.

At the hearing, which I attended along with AAG Educational Affairs Director Michael Solem, Spellings was asked several times about continued implementation of the Administration's signature No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Several panel Democrats criticized the lack of funding the states have received for the law's programs. Spellings promised to work on the kinks in the law, but also stressed that the administration will be focused on extending the No Child testing provisions into high schools. (The current testing system only covers elementary and middle schools.)

Spellings promises to have a successful term as Education Secretary. She is well respected on the Hill and unlike her predecessor Rod Paige, she has the close ear of the president. I and other AAG staff will work closely with Spellings' office to promote geography education as policy-makers plan for the eventual reauthorization of NCLB. Senator Michael Enzi (R-WY), chair of the Senate's education committee indicated that NCLB will likely be reauthorized in 2006. ■

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