

# AAG Washington Monitor

## Omnibus Appropriations Bill Passed

In what some Washington insiders have termed the Saturday night massacre, Congress hastily passed the Fiscal Year 2005 consolidated appropriations bill on the evening of November 20, in time to leave town for Thanksgiving week. The legislation, which had to be corrected in early December because of a controversial provision giving certain members of Congress access to individual tax returns, incorporates nine of the thirteen regular appropriations bills that must be completed every year. Following are brief capsules on how some agencies of interest to the geographic community fared:

### National Science Foundation (NSF)

The omnibus bill was very tough on the NSF. The agency's research and related activities (R&RA) account received only \$4.221 billion, \$30 million under the FY 2004 funding level of \$4.251 billion and \$231 million below the president's FY 2005 request of \$4.452 billion. This marks only the third time in the last twenty years and the first time since President Bush took office that R&RA funding has been cut. The foundation as a whole suffered a \$105 million cut from the FY 2004 appropriation.

Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI), a senior member of the House Science Committee and a PhD physicist by training, issued a statement that he is "concerned and astonished" by Congress's treatment of the NSF in the omnibus. Referencing the more than 150 of his colleagues who signed a statement in support of increased NSF funding, Ehlers said that the budget cut shows "dangerous disregard for our nation's future." Specific data is not available yet as to how the Geography and Regional Sciences program fared.

### National Endowment for the Humanities

The news for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is a bit more positive than that for NSF. The NEH received an appropriation of \$138.1 million, \$2.8 million or 2.1 percent above last year's funding of \$135.3 million. While the

administration had requested \$162 million for the agency in FY 2005 and the funding came in well below that number, NEH officials can take solace in the fact that their budget increased, a trait certainly not common to many domestic discretionary accounts.

### Census Bureau

The Commerce Department's Census Bureau was one of the few big winners to come out of the omnibus scramble. Overall, the legislation provides \$744.8 million for the bureau in FY 2005. This represents a \$120.6 million or 19.3 percent increase over the FY 2004 funding of \$624.2 million. Much of this increase is due to the \$79.3 million boost given to the American Community Survey (ACS), a program designed to replace the census long form by providing year-by-year data on communities of all sizes.

The ACS has been a major aspect of the bureau's Census 2010 plan for several years now. Despite this, the program was facing elimination as the Senate's original version of the appropriations bill proposed level funding of around \$65 million for the ACS in FY 2005. Census Director C. Louis Kincannon had made clear that to keep the survey on track for full implementation by 2010, an appropriation of at least \$140 million would be required.

*In mid-October, the AAG joined a number of other organizations in encouraging top congressional appropriators to provide ample funding to the ACS for FY 2005. In his letter to the members, AAG Executive Director Doug Richardson noted, "Without the ACS, the ability to systematically gauge geographical, social, and economic conditions in most counties and metropolitan areas will be severely limited. This would greatly harm the ability to assess the effectiveness of federal and state policies in these areas and to conduct research to adjust and improve upon these efforts."*

I am happy to report that these arguments prevailed, as Congress provided \$144.1 million for the ACS in FY 2005. Also within the bureau, the Periodic

Censuses and Programs account received \$548.7 million, a \$116.8 million boost over the FY 2004 level.

### United States Geological Survey (USGS)

The USGS received an FY 2005 appropriation of \$935.7 million. This is slightly below last year's figure of \$949.7 million, due largely to across the board cuts in the omnibus to keep the total spending under a set cap. Congress again ignored the administration's annual attempt to keep the survey below \$920 million. The president's budget for FY 2005 had requested just \$919.8 million for the USGS.

### Economic Research Service

The Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service (ERS) received an appropriation of \$74.2 million for FY 2005. This is a 4.5 percent increase over the FY 2004 level of \$71 million. The ERS conducts social science (including geographic) analysis on agriculture, food, natural resources, and rural development. ERS research informs and enhances public and private decision making at the federal, state, and local levels on agricultural and rural programs.

## Bement Confirmed as NSF Director

On November 20, the U.S. Senate confirmed President Bush's nomination of Arden L. Bement, Jr., to serve as Director of the National Science Foundation. Three days later, the president signed Bement's commission, formally installing the new director. Bement had been leading the foundation in an acting capacity since February. In assuming the directorship, Bement resigned as head of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a position he had occupied since late 2001. For more on Dr. Bement's background, please see the November edition of the AAG Washington Monitor. ■

John Wertman  
jwertman@aag.org