

# AAG Washington Monitor

## Higher Ed Commission Releases Final Report

On September 26, U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings appeared at the National Press Club to release the final report of her Commission on the Future of Higher Education and comment on certain key elements of the report. Of note, Spellings stated that some of her immediate goals related to higher ed policy will be:

- Applying selected principles of No Child Left Behind to high schools, a recent goal of the Bush Administration. The commission's final report suggested that many high school students graduate unprepared to do college level work.
- Making it far easier for students to apply for financial aid.
- Pushing accountability by providing "matching funds to colleges, universities, and states that collect and publicly report student learning outcomes."
- Pushing accreditors towards thinking specifically about how much students are learning and to what effect.

Spellings also noted that her department's efforts on higher ed policy will be led by Sara Tucker Martinez, a member of the commission and the president's nominee to serve as undersecretary of education. Martinez is currently president and CEO of the San Francisco-based Hispanic Scholarship Fund. To view the commission's full report, please visit: [www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports.html).

## Several Sponsors Back Geography Ed Bills; Action Could Come in 2007

The geography education bill, "Teaching Geography is Fundamental," which has been introduced in both houses of Congress and has been closely monitored by AAG staff, has numerous prominent sponsors but stands little chance of

passage until at least 2007. Congressional activity has virtually ended for the year owing to the midterm elections.

In the Senate, the bill (S. 1376) has fifteen co-sponsors, headlined by Sens. John Kerry (D-MA), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Ted Kennedy (D-MA), and John Warner (R-VA). The House companion measure (H.R. 5519) has nineteen co-sponsors, including prominent Reps. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) and Chris Shays (R-CT).

The bills could be acted upon when Congress considers reauthorization of No Child Left Behind legislation next year, but they would have to be reintroduced, as all un-passed legislation dies at the end of a two-year congressional session. The AAG will continue to follow and support action on geography education legislation.

## Myers Confirmed as USGS Director

On September 15, the U.S. Senate confirmed President Bush's nomination of Mark Myers to serve as director of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) by voice vote. Bush nominated Myers, a former state geologist and head of Alaska's Geological Survey, in May. Myers succeeds acting Director P. Patrick Leahy, who has led the survey since Chip Groat's departure in June 2005.

Myers is a former oil company official and also served as an officer in the U.S. Air Force Reserve from 1977 to 2003, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. He received his doctorate in geology from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and his bachelor and master of science degrees in geology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Upon the confirmation, Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne asserted, "Mark brings two decades of experience in geological science and strong leadership skills to his position. I have every confidence he will do an out-

standing job as Director of the U.S. Geological Survey." For more on Myers's background, please see the June issue of this column.

## Bold Election Prediction

I thought it might be fun for politically-interested readers if I issued a quick gut-instinct election prediction. At the time of writing (October 11), we are in the midst of the Mark Foley mess, so with current political winds as they're blowing, I'll go with the following: Democrats take over the House 225-210 (net change of twenty-two seats), making Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) the first female speaker of the house in U.S. history. In the key Senate races, the Democrats win in Montana (Jon Tester), Pennsylvania (Bob Casey), Rhode Island (Sheldon Whitehouse), Ohio (Sherrod Brown), New Jersey (Bob Menendez), and Tennessee (Harold Ford, Jr.). The Republicans get razor-thin wins in Missouri (Jim Talent) and Virginia (George Allen).

Joe Lieberman holds off Ned Lamont in Connecticut by about four percentage points, leaving us with fifty Republicans, forty-eight Democrats, and two Independents who will caucus with the Democrats (I'm counting Lieberman as an Independent and also assuming that Bernie Sanders wins in Vermont). The fifty-fifty tie will give Vice President Cheney the tie-breaking vote and keep the Senate in tenuous Republican hands. (If this situation plays out, it will be interesting to see how much pressure moderate Republicans Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins face from their mostly moderate to liberal constituents in Maine to pull a Jim Jeffords and caucus with the Democrats.) Stay tuned! ■

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