

# AAG Washington Monitor

## AAG Urges Congress to Support NDGPS

On August 24, the AAG sent a letter to key appropriators on Capitol Hill urging them to fund the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Nationwide Differential Global Positioning System (NDGPS) at the full level of \$30 million for fiscal year 2007. The program was zeroed out in early versions of relevant appropriations bills.

The NDGPS is designed to boost the accuracy of the nation's GPS satellite navigation and positioning system. As designed, the NDGPS would permit GPS users to benefit from positioning accuracy of less than one meter. Unless adequate funds are appropriated by Congress however, this vital system will be put on hold despite the fact that more than two-thirds of U.S. territory already has been outfitted with the hardware necessary for implementation.

The Bush administration has convincingly recognized the need for strengthening the nation's commitment to GPS and augmentation systems like NDGPS. On December 15, 2004, the president signed a policy document directing a much more aggressive approach toward building, improving, and maintaining nationwide GPS. In the document, the president directed the U.S. government to provide on a continuous, worldwide basis, civil space-based, positioning, navigation, and timing services free of direct user fees for civil, commercial, and scientific uses, and for homeland security.

AAG Executive Director Douglas Richardson picked up on this in the letter to Congress, asserting, "The NDGPS is essential to a number of national needs, including highway transportation, homeland security, agriculture, environmental protection, railways, meteorology, dredging, surveying, and mapmaking, as well as to many of the researchers and educators included in our nationwide membership of over 9,000." The AAG also plans to write to DOT urging greater funding for the program in future presidential budgets.

## Colorado Teacher Suspended for Displaying Flags

On August 28, AAG Executive Director Douglas Richardson wrote to Cindy Stevenson, superintendent of the Jefferson County, Colorado School District, to protest recent administrative actions taken against Eric Hamlin, a seventh grade geography teacher at Carmody Middle School. Hamlin, in a case that drew significant media attention, was placed on leave for displaying various international flags in his classroom, supposedly in violation of state law.

Stevenson's office has cited Colorado Revised Statute 18-11-205, which states: "Any person who displays any flag other than the flag of the United States of America or the state of Colorado or any of its subdivisions, agencies or institutions upon any state, county, municipal or other public building or adjacent grounds within this state commits a class one petty offense." Richardson and others defending Hamlin, however, have noted that the law permits an exception for "the display of any flag ... that is part of a temporary display of any instructional or historical materials not permanently affixed or attached."

In the letter to Stevenson, Richardson wrote, "As our nation continues to face the threat of conflict around the world and reflect on the lessons of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, the subject of geography is more important than ever. Despite this, we are confronted with staggering rates of geographic illiteracy among individuals at nearly all levels of education attainment. Accordingly, students all across America should be encouraged to study geography and learn about the world around us." Calling Hamlin's case "astounding," Richardson asked Jefferson County officials to return Hamlin to active duty as soon as possible and asserted that "Mr. Hamlin and teachers like him should be encouraged and applauded in their efforts, not sidetracked by silly actions such as the ones taken against him."

## Academic Freedom Attacked in Iran

Since taking office a year ago, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has used his power and influence to push liberal and secular professors and instructors out of his nation's universities. In his most forceful move, Ahmadinejad named a cleric to head Tehran University earlier this year, the first time a religious figure has been in charge at the nation's oldest higher learning institution. The appointment hastened the retirement of dozens from teaching positions at Tehran and sparked strong protests.

In a recent address to university students, Ahmadinejad called on his hard-line followers to pressure institutions into dismissing moderates in teaching positions. These tactics have followed closely on methods the he has employed in forcing adversarial bureaucrats out of government and diplomatic positions. As head of the country's Council of Cultural Revolution, Ahmadinejad has the authority to make university-level changes himself, but Iranian observers suspect he is reticent to directly confront the numerous moderates that remain in key positions at Tehran and other higher learning institutions.

In recent months, the U.S. State Department has condemned Iran's human rights violations, including those of students. An August 1 press statement by department spokesman Sean McCormack asserted: "The Iranian government's severe repression of dissidents...is part of a deliberate campaign to silence the student movement in particular, and civil society more broadly... We call on the Iranian government to respect the human rights of all Iranian citizens, including students, members of religious minorities, workers, and women, and to release those arrested and imprisoned as a consequence of defending universally accepted human rights and freedoms." ■

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