

Washington Monitor

Senate Hearing Focuses on Scope of No Child Left Behind

On April 24, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) continued its consideration of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization with a hearing on *NCLB and Middle and High School*. Committee Chairman Edward Kennedy (D-MA) opened the session by asserting that "It's clear that secondary school students need as much attention and help in these essential courses as students in lower grades do. If we don't get into what is happening in the middle (and high) schools we will miss the basic goal of No Child Left Behind." Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) agreed, stating "We make a mistake when we tack up NCLB in the vacuum of K-8."

The panel's ranking member, Mike Enzi (R-WY), noted that on average 7,000 students drop out of school each day, and at the present graduation rate more than 12 million students will quit school within the next decade. Factoring in the disparity in earning potential between dropouts and graduates, Enzi estimated the high cost of these lost students to the economy, calculating that had dropouts from the class of 2006 instead graduated on time they would eventually contribute an additional \$309 billion in income to the U.S. economy over the course of their lifetimes. Enzi declared, "We simply cannot afford to lose those resources."

Witness Robert Balfanz, from the Johns Hopkins Center for Social Organization of School, stated that only 15 percent of the nation's high schools produce almost half its dropouts. He urged the federal government, in partnership with states and local school districts, to take the lead in transforming these lowest performing secondary schools. Another witness, John Podesta of the Center for American Progress, pointed to the Graduation Promise Act (GPA), legislation introduced by Senators Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Burr, and Kennedy, as a necessary and vital step towards the goal of improving graduation rates. The GPA would create a set of federal initiatives aimed at helping states fight high school attrition. Kennedy picked up on this point by asserting that federal investment at the middle and high school level is insufficient. The main source of federal funds for

schools comes through the Title I program. However, a quarter of the schools with the lowest graduation rates and a majority of low-income students receive Title I funding.

Former Governor Bob Wise (D-WV), now with the Alliance for Educational Excellence, pointed to education research and data collection as key to solving these problems, asserting that "Educators and policy makers need accurate information about how students are doing in school." He called for the reauthorized NCLB legislation to include \$100 million in competitive grants for developing high-quality longitudinal data systems and a data collection infrastructure, and another \$100 million in formula grants to the states, to assist in aligning those systems with district systems. Wise said that such alignments would build educator capacity at state and local levels, improving both teaching and learning.

We will continue to update you on the No Child Left Behind reauthorization process as it continues.

Geography Research Faces Reductions at USGS

The Bush Administration's FY 2008 Budget for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) proposes a reduction of \$4.3 million to the Geographic Analysis and Monitoring Program, the primary geographic research program at the USGS. The proposed funding decrease will result in the elimination of geographic research on the consequences and impacts of land cover change, as well as Geography's support of Priority Ecosystem Science (PES), a research program aimed at supporting adaptive management of ecosystems that have near-term societal concern and significant long-term societal value. Specific ecosystems included in the PES program include the Greater Everglades; Yellowstone National Park; the Mojave Desert; and the watersheds of the Chesapeake Bay, San Francisco Bay, and the Platte River.

Additional projects that will be adversely affected include: analysis of the environmental impact of wildfire in Alaska and to lands managed by the Department of the Interior (DOI); research on the carbon storage capabilities of land cover; assessments of urbanization and loss of wetlands on water quality; and investigations of the quality of

wildlife habitat in relation to energy development, expanding agricultural production, urbanization, and road construction.

Virginia Brings Interactive GPS to State Parks

In unveiling an interactive kiosk at First Landing State Park in Virginia Beach on April 9, Virginia Governor Tim Kaine (D) demonstrated how state parks may now be experienced through virtual tours. Virginia is the first state in the nation to adopt interactive GPS technology statewide.

The kiosks allow park visitors to access GPS-based trail information, wildlife spotting guides, information on park amenities, printable guides and maps, program descriptions, schedules, and more. Stations also provide interactive virtual tours of every trail in the state park system. More than 30,000 state park images appear in the program, and approximately 500 miles of state parks trails have been mapped with global positioning coordinates.

"The amount of information contained in this system really is amazing," said Kaine. "This system enhances a park visitor's stay by providing information on the park, nearby attractions, and even local emergency information. These interactive kiosks also can help a visitor plan future visits to our state park system."

The project has been hailed as a public-private partnership. Dominion—one of the nation's largest producers of energy, headquartered in Richmond—serves as its primary sponsor. Officials from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), managers of the state park system, and the Virginia Association for Parks were also heavily involved in the initiative, which cost approximately \$600,000 to develop.

First Landing State Park was selected for the unveiling as one of the six original state parks and as the site for a historical reenactment of the first landing of the Virginia Company on American soil, in honor of the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement. Additional information about the new technology and Virginia State Parks can be found on the web at www.dcr.virginia.gov. ■

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