

# AAG Washington Monitor

## With No Child reauthorization looming, AAG, GENIP Reach out to Capitol Hill

As the Democratic Congress continues to get the feel of power after twelve years in the minority, Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA) are readying to examine and reauthorize the Bush Administration's signature No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). No Child, of course, is the given name of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA); Kennedy and Miller are the respective chairs of the Senate and House Committees with jurisdiction over education issues.

The ESEA was last reauthorized in 2001, shortly after the Bush Administration came into office with a promise of holding schools accountable for student progress. The result was NCLB, a bi-partisan law which has drawn both passionate critics and defenders in the five years since it went into effect. Leaving aside its actual impact, the act has been a frustration to the geography community because it failed to remedy the unfortunate reality that geography is the only one among the nine core academic subjects identified in the law not to receive dedicated federal funding.

To this end and with the law's reauthorization due, the AAG initiated an effort by the Geography Education National Implementation Project (GENIP), a coalition made up of the AAG, the American Geographical Society, the National Council for Geographic Education, and the National Geographic Society, to reach out to Kennedy and Miller. In a February 5 letter, GENIP urged the Chairmen to "give strong support to the teaching of geography" in the proposal they develop for the reauthorization of NCLB.

The letter asserted that "Geography is important to every American – a central

plank in the building of each citizen's civic responsibility. Geography brings a necessary spatial view to life situations and decisions – from family, school, and the workplace to the local community and broader society. Geography helps us understand the connections between peoples and places – and with the natural environment. It affords us critical insight into the patterns and movements of people, goods, ideas, and capital – and to the realities of resources and conflicts. Geography provides essential workforce skills. The study of geography enables students to grasp the explanatory power of maps and increasingly critical geospatial technologies – such as remote sensing, geographic information systems (GIS), and global positioning systems (GPS). Geography helps us understand our own place as American citizens – and the place of the United States in an uncertain world."

In the letter, GENIP also offered to provide an expert witness to the committees, should they wish to open a discussion involving geography education this year. We will keep you apprised of developments as ESEA proposals are developed in Congress.

## Continuing Resolution Offers Good News for Science

On January 31, the House of Representatives took a big step towards finalizing the FY 2007 federal appropriations process – for a fiscal year that began over four months ago. The unusually late action was necessitated when the 109th Congress closed up shop in December having passed only two major appropriations bills – those for Defense and Homeland Security. After the Democrats seized power in the November elections, Rep. David Obey (D-WI) and Sen. Robert Byrd (D-WV), the House and Senate appropriations chairmen, announced that their

intention was to pass a full-year continuing resolution (CR) that would continue all federal accounts at 2006 levels for the 2007 fiscal year.

This was terrible news to the science and higher-education communities, which had worked hard to encourage Congress and the Bush Administration to significantly increase the budget of the National Science Foundation (NSF) and other federal research accounts. Tentative agreement had been reached on a package which would have provided significant increases for scientific research, but this was negated by the plan for the full-year CR.

Fortunes were reversed, however, as the final draft of the CR provided significant funding additions of interest to research advocates and the higher education community. The final draft, which passed the House by a margin of 286 to 140, with 57 Republicans joining all but two Democrats, provided these increases: The National Science Foundation was boosted by \$335 million over its FY 2006 amount, the National Institutes of Health received an increase of \$619.5 million (enough to fund 500 additional project grants), and the Pell Grant program was given an additional \$615.4 million, increasing the maximum grant to \$4,310 (\$260 more than in FY 2006). These additional funds are certainly welcome in the face of a tight federal budget climate.

While the CR must still be ratified by the Senate, AAG members should certainly be pleased that the efforts of the AAG through a united Washington science community have helped to preserve the funding increases that had been agreed to in 2006. Hopefully, these funding trends will continue into 2007 and beyond. ■

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