

# AAG Washington Monitor

## Miller Delays NCLB Bill; September Push Promised

On July 30, Rep. George Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, gave a major speech at the National Press Club on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization. No Child, of course, is the given name of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the major federal law guiding policy for the K-12 grades. Miller, unlike many prominent Democrats, spoke passionately about NCLB and reaffirmed his commitment to reauthorize the act in the coming fall.

In his remarks, Miller argued that despite some flaws, NCLB has made American schools more accountable and helped give more children access to "a highly qualified teacher and a good curriculum in a decent school." He also noted that "Throughout our schools and communities, the American people have a very strong sense that the No Child Left Behind Act is not fair—that it is not flexible and that it is not funded—and they are not wrong...I can tell you that there are no votes in the U.S. House of Representatives for continuing the No Child Left Behind Act without making serious changes to it."

To this end, Miller promised to move a reauthorization bill in September that would fix many of the problems with the 2001 law. If this fails, it is almost certain that action will be forestalled until 2009 at the earliest.

For more details on No Child Left Behind, see "Educating Congress on Geographic Education" in the July/August 2007 issue of the AAG Newsletter (page 2).

## America COMPETES Act Makes Social Science a Priority

On August 9, 2007, in his last major action before leaving Washington for a summer break, President Bush signed the

bi-partisan America COMPETES (Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science) Act into law.

The legislation authorizes \$43 billion in research and science education spending over three years at a variety of federal agencies and includes a \$22 billion authorization for the National Science Foundation through fiscal year 2010. COMPETES was passed 367-57 in the House and by unanimous consent in the Senate.

Of importance to the geography community, the bill adds the social sciences to the disciplines considered a priority at NSF. The Foundation's Geography and Regional Science Program falls under the Social, Behavioral, and Economic (SBE) Sciences Directorate and the COMPETES act specifically makes the social sciences a priority in spending on "safety and security" and "competitiveness or innovation."

This boost for the social sciences was orchestrated primarily by Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA), a PhD and a psychologist by training, and responded to efforts last year by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) to remove the SBE sciences from NSF in another competitiveness bill. AAG Executive Director Douglas Richardson wrote to Baird to thank him for his efforts, noting "we at the AAG worked hard last year with our friends at COSSA and other scientific societies to meet the challenge posed by Senator Hutchison's amendment and we are heartened that we have come so far in the last year."

Among education initiatives impacted by COMPETES, the law increases authorization levels for K-12 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education by increasing funding for scholarship programs to train and retrain math and science teachers and by further encouraging math and science partnerships between universities and elementary and secondary schools.

The legislation also provides for expansion of the Graduate Fellowship program, the Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) program, and the early career grants program (CAREER), and creates a new pilot program of seed grants for outstanding new investigators. In addition, the bill includes provisions to help broaden participation in STEM fields at all levels. It requests a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report to identify barriers to and opportunities for increasing the number of underrepresented minorities in STEM fields.

Differing versions of the legislation initially passed the House in May and the Senate in July. House and Senate negotiators worked behind the scenes for several weeks to resolve differences between the two bills. On August 2, the final compromise passed both the House and Senate.

An important caveat to the good news in this bill is the looming appropriations battle set to play out this fall in Washington. The Bush Administration has promised to veto any of the twelve federal spending bills that exceed the levels called for in his FY 2008 budget. However, Congressional Democrats, enjoying their first year in full control since 1994, have promised to fight for programs they consider priorities, likely including research funding. The President called for \$6.4 billion in NSF funding for FY 2008, but given bi-partisan agreement on the COMPETES act, it remains unclear if or by how much he would agree to additional appropriations for the agency. We will keep you up-to-date as the battle plays out in the coming months.

*Thanks to our friends at COSSA for providing input for this article. ■*

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