

# Washington Monitor

## Annual Meeting Session Highlights AAG Policy Outreach

On April 18, I chaired a session during the AAG Annual Meeting focused on the Association's efforts to support issues of importance to our membership. Joining me on the panel were Daniel Edelson, Vice President for Education and Children's Programs at the National Geographic Society (NGS), and Howard Silver, Executive Director of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA).



Daniel Edelson and Howard Silver with the AAG's John Wertman in Boston.

In some introductory comments, I applauded Doug Richardson's leadership of the AAG and noted some of the advocacy efforts the Association has taken during his tenure as Executive Director. Primarily, I pointed to our outreach to both Congress and the AAG membership in support of winning dedicated funding for geography education as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (better known as No Child Left Behind).

As readers of this column are well aware, we have worked closely with our friends at GENIP (including NGS) in outreach to the House and Senate education committees and individual members of Congress who are well positioned to advance geography. We have also involved the AAG membership by asking those of you in the field to contact your elected representatives in support of this crucial endeavor. In my comments, I

also noted the AAG's support of funding for the National Science Foundation, the United States Geological Survey, and other federal programs of interest to our members.

In his remarks, Edelson pointed to the Teaching Geography is Fundamental (TGIF) legislation (S. 727, H.R. 1228), which is aimed at increasing the number of geography teachers. He noted that by championing the bill, the NGS has tried to step into a void left by the federal

government, and he asserted that the Bush Administration has at times been "openly hostile" to geography education efforts.

Edelson also stated that while TGIF would provide \$15 million to support geography teacher training efforts, in reality "we need \$150 million to make a real differ-

ence." He closed by asserting that beginning in January it will be critical for the geo ed community to work with the new Administration to "institutionalize geography teaching in a federal program," most likely at the Department of Education.

Silver began by noting that the AAG was a founding member of COSSA in 1981—when the Reagan Administration threatened wholesale cuts of social and behavioral science research programs. He also discussed our long-term involvement in the Consortium and pointed out that former AAG President Susan Cutter is currently serving in the same role with COSSA.

Silver also made some insightful comments related to the geography education discussion and shared that he had recently heard a keynote address by William Tate, President of the American Educational Research Association, entitled "The Geography of Education" — in which

Tate asserted that the quality of a student's education is heavily dependent on where the student lives. Silver also took time to mention a few new ideas and programs which will be potentially beneficial to geographers and social scientists of all types, including the DOD program discussed below.

## Gates Proposes Expanded DOD Support of Social Science Research

On April 15, in a speech to the Association of American Universities, Defense Secretary Robert Gates — a former president of Texas A&M University and PhD historian — told higher education leaders that he plans to significantly expand Pentagon funding of social science and humanities research. Gates wants to do so under a program called the "Minerva Consortia" and he promised that the research funding will feature "complete openness and rigid adherence to academic freedom and integrity."

Gates also asserted that he is "interested in soliciting diverse points of view — regardless of whether those views are critical of the department's efforts. Too many mistakes have been made over the years because our government and military did not understand — or even seek to understand — the countries or cultures we were dealing with."

There would seem to be significant room under the program for geographers to seek funding. But some scholars — despite Gates' reassurances — have questioned whether they want their research to be reliant on a Pentagon grant.

We will keep you updated as the program develops — and as any controversies related to the funding source arise. ■

John Wertman  
jwertman@aag.org