

Washington Monitor

AAG Hill Visits Promote Geography Education

In early November, I was joined by AAG staff members Susan Gallagher, Matthew Koepp, and Michael Solem for two meetings on Capitol Hill aimed at promoting attention to geography education in the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). We met with key staff of the House Education and Labor Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee.

In both meetings, we reaffirmed the AAG's longstanding commitment that there should be specific funding authorizations for geography education programs as part of NCLB. This is a position we have taken numerous times in letters to and meetings with key policymakers. The staffers we met with were supportive of our message and urged us to continue promoting it in other outreach to Congress. Accordingly, we will look to schedule additional Hill meetings focused on this important topic in January and beyond – while the Obama team is settling in and reauthorization negotiations start to pick up.

We also are working closely with the National Geographic Society and our other GENIP partners on this critical issue. We were heartened that the Senate staff we met with specifically pointed to the existing Teaching Geography is Fundamental legislation as a key vehicle for Hill action. We will keep you informed of key developments.

Interior, Labor, and EPA Updates

In last month's column, I detailed some of the people thought to be leading contenders for Obama Cabinet jobs of interest to geographers. The President-elect still has yet to nominate anyone for any of these three key jobs – and here are the latest updates:

Secretary of the Interior: Jay Inslee, Ken Salazar, and Robert Kennedy, Jr. seem to have fallen out of favor and it now appears likely that Obama will either nominate Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) or Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA). Both are westerners – which is typical for Interior – and both would bring subject-matter expertise to the job. Grijalva is Chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands – and he is well respected by the environmental community. He has a strong liberal voting record and would be the second prominent Latino tapped for Obama's Cabinet (after Bill Richardson). Thompson is a moderate "Blue Dog" Democrat and is a key member of the House Ways & Means Committee. He is a vineyard owner by background – one of his key calling cards for the Interior job – and he comes from the nation's most populous state, not a factor to be disregarded.

Secretary of Labor: As I reported last month, David Bonior remains a leading candidate, but Dick Gephardt and Andrew Stern seem to have fallen to the second

tier. Others being strongly considered include Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm (D); Mary Beth Maxwell, executive director of American Rights at Work; Ed McElroy, former president of the American Federation of Teachers; and Maria Echaveste, Deputy Chief of Staff in the Clinton White House. Obama will be looking to his nominee to represent union views as the Administration's economic package is developed – and the AAG will work to insure the new Secretary's team continues to promote geospatial technologies as a key growth industry.

Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency: Robert Kennedy, Jr. remains a second-tier candidate for the EPA job, but buzz is now swirling around Obama transition team member Lisa Jackson. Jackson served previously as New Jersey's Commissioner of Environmental Protection and she has been advising the Obama team on key environmental issues. She is a land and water use expert – but a chemical engineer by training. The AAG will be sure to promote geographic expertise to Jackson if she is indeed picked to lead the EPA.

Please be sure to also see the list of select government jobs of potential interest to the geographic community that will be filled by the Obama Administration in the coming months. The list can be found on page 10 of the newsletter. ■

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Getting to Las Vegas

There are many low cost ways to get to Las Vegas. The city is easily accessible by air, rail, bus, and car. The AAG has arranged further discounts from United Airlines, Amtrak, and Hertz. The Las Vegas airport offers hundreds of economical flights each day from domestic and international locations. For more information on travel discounts for the Annual Meeting, see www.aag.org/annualmeetings/2009/transportation.