

# Washington Monitor

## House Narrowly Passes Groundbreaking Climate Bill

On June 26, the House of Representatives narrowly passed a historic climate bill that would curb U.S. greenhouse gas emissions through a system known as cap-and-trade. The final vote was 219-212—a narrow result that included 44 Democrats casting “no” votes, while only eight Republicans crossed party lines to support the legislation. President Obama and former Vice President Gore lobbied members of Congress hard in support of passage.

The cap-and-trade system aims to regulate emissions by forcing the largest producers of greenhouse gasses to clean up their operations or fund projects that help offset the release of these gasses into the environment. The ultimate aim of the bill is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 80 percent by 2050, a target supported by many climate scientists.

The House vote has been supported by many in the research community. Just last month, federal scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) warned that “the current trend in the emission of greenhouse gas pollution is significantly above the worst-case scenario that this and other reports have considered.” The Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-profit organization originally formed at MIT, hailed the House vote, saying the bill “sets us on the path toward curbing global warming.”

Not all reaction to the bill was positive, however. The Institute for Energy Research, a non-profit supported by a mix of individuals and industry groups, warned that the legislation would be very costly to major American businesses—costs that eventually will be pushed along to consumers. Many of the Democrats who voted against the bill rep-

resent pro-business districts or parts of the country that are heavily reliant on coal mining—an energy source that will be undercut by provisions in the legislation.

Action on the bill now turns to the Senate, and the prospects there are difficult to predict. It may be challenging for the Democratic leadership to craft a bill that can achieve a filibuster-proof majority—but the President has said that the issue is one of his major priorities for 2009. A vote is unlikely before the fall.

## NCLB Reauthorization Stalled by Healthcare Reform Push

As readers of this column are well aware, the AAG in recent years has vigorously supported dedicated funding to support the teaching of geography at the elementary and secondary school levels in the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. While we have made progress towards this goal through educational meetings with Congressional staffers and outreach by AAG members, committee work on the bill has been frustrated by delays on Capitol Hill.

Under the original schedule, NCLB was due for reauthorization in 2007, but that has been pushed back at different times by varied political considerations. The latest roadblock has come in the form of the national healthcare reform process—a major priority of President Obama and the Congressional leadership that is being led by the same committees with jurisdiction over education issues.

In the Senate, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee has taken a lead role (along with the Senate Finance Committee) in the health reform process and has spent very little time discussing NCLB issues this year. On the House side,

the Education and Labor panel has been one of three committees working on health reform—though it does not have primary jurisdiction over health policy or financing issues. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), Chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, has continued to lead hearings on important education issues in recent months, but his primary focus will remain on healthcare for the time being.

Congressional leaders have signaled that they would like to finalize a healthcare reform bill by the end of the summer. Whether that timetable is ambitious or not remains to be seen, but regardless, the NCLB reauthorization will remain stalled for the time being. The AAG will continue to work behind the scenes to inform policy-makers about the need for geography education until Congress is ready to turn its attention back to the issue.

## Interior Appointee Will Oversee USGS

On June 19, the Senate confirmed President Obama’s nomination of Anne Castle to serve as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science. In her new role, Castle will oversee the United States Geological Survey (USGS). She is a lawyer by profession and has spent her career working on water issues at a Denver law office.

Castle does have some government-related experience—she previously served on two state commissions in Colorado that examined key water use issues. Service on both of these bodies required gubernatorial appointment. Castle has been sworn in to her new position with the federal government. ■

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