

# Washington Monitor

## Holdren Leads Climate Efforts Despite Health Care Focus

As was noted in the July-August issue of this column, the House recently passed a groundbreaking energy bill that includes substantial measures aimed at reversing climate change. The climate issue is an important one for the Obama Administration, but with the President and much of his team focused on the healthcare reform debate, John Holdren, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, has been leading Administration energy policy efforts in the Senate.

Holdren, who joined the Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School and who has worked closely with many geographers on sustainability science and policy, recently testified before two key Senate Committees as to why the President views climate change as such a critical issue—and how solving this global problem is directly tied to scientific undertakings.

On July 22, testifying before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Holdren asserted that, "Continuing to strengthen the science base for policies and strategies in (the climate change) domain going forward will bring significant rewards in terms of our confidence in the performance of the approaches that are put in place (and) the ability to improve those approaches over time." And on July 30, Holdren told the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation that "Investments in climate science over the past several decades have contributed to greatly increasing understanding of global climate change, including its attribution mainly to human influences."

It is likely that energy will be a key topic for the U.S. Senate during the fall. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), who chairs the Environment and Public Works Committee, recently delayed work on a Senate bill until September. Beyond that, prospects for the bill remain unclear, as does the number of Republican votes the leadership will need to defeat a filibuster. The President would

very much like to be able to sign a comprehensive bill by December, when he will be going to Copenhagen for an international summit on climate change.

## Congress Funds NSF Below Level of Obama Request

The full House and the Senate Appropriations Committee have acted in recent weeks to advance the annual bill that funds the National Science Foundation (NSF) and multiple other federal agencies. The separate versions of the CJS (Commerce-Justice-Science) appropriations bill each contain allocations for NSF that are slightly below the amount requested by the Obama Administration.

The House passed the CJS bill on June 18 by a vote of 259-157—with 24 Republicans supporting the legislation and eight Democrats voting against. Their version includes \$5.642 billion for the NSF's Research and Related Activities (R&RA) Account for Fiscal Year 2010, a number \$23.1 million lower than the President's proposal. In accompanying language, the House tied the decreased amount to the \$3 billion in stimulus funding allocated to the Foundation in February. Still, even the lessened figure represents an increase of \$459 million from the FY 2009 enacted amount.

The Senate Appropriations Committee, meanwhile, approved a comparable number of \$5.618 billion for R&RA by a vote of 30-0. As this amount is below the House figure, the final number will be set by a compromise between Congressional negotiators that will likely come in September. The House and Senate bills do not specify intended amounts for specific NSF accounts—such as the Geography program—so those allocations will be left to Foundation leaders (with Congressional review and guidance). Regardless of how the final numbers turn out, 2009 will go down as a record year for NSF funding—led by the substantial investment made when Congress passed and the President signed the stimulus bill.

## Groves Confirmed by Senate; McNutt Tapped for USGS

On July 13, the Senate confirmed University of Michigan Sociologist Robert Groves as Director of the U.S. Census Bureau. Groves' confirmation came in a voice vote after the Senate agreed to cut off debate by a margin of 76-15—with all 15 "no" votes being cast by Republicans. Groves now takes the helm of an agency undergoing a major ramp-up to prepare for the 2010 Census—a process that will have a significant impact on federal funding allocations and political redistricting decisions for all 50 states. For more on Groves' background and the political controversy surrounding the nomination, please see the May issue of the *Washington Monitor* (*AAG Newsletter*, v.44, n.5, p.9).

Separately, on July 9, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced that President Obama intends to nominate marine geophysicist Marcia McNutt to serve as Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The nomination is subject to Senate confirmation but is not expected to generate much, if any, controversy. McNutt currently serves as President and CEO of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute in California. She worked at USGS in the early stages of her career.

As Director, McNutt will serve as a top advisor to Salazar and will report directly to Anne Castle, who was confirmed on June 19 as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Water and Science. See the July-August *Washington Monitor* for more on Castle (*AAG Newsletter*, v.44, n.7, p.9). In addition to extensive work throughout her career on oceanographic issues, McNutt also spent time researching earthquake prediction. She earned her PhD at the Scripps Institution in La Jolla, California and is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science as well as a member of the National Academy of Sciences. ■

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