

AAG Washington Monitor

AAG Sponsors Two Congressional Briefings

The AAG recently sponsored two well-attended and successful congressional briefings, one on democracy and the other on geographic managements systems. Both were held in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill and were done in conjunction with affiliated social and behavioral science organizations. Below are write-ups on the two events:

AAG Briefing on The State of Democracy

On May 23, the AAG co-sponsored a congressional symposium on "The State of Democracy: Engaging a Changing Citizenry," which brought together six distinguished social and behavioral scientists with a goal of engaging congressional and federal agency staff and representatives in thinking about what defines, challenges, and sustains democracy in the United States and abroad. House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) was the session's congressional sponsor.

William A.V. Clark, professor of geography at UCLA and the AAG nominated recipient of the Decade of Behavior Research Award on Democracy, presented a talk entitled "Demography as Destiny: How our Demographic Future will Change the Rules." He explored the implications of demographic change on the U.S. political process and asserted that continuing migration and the increasing age of the population will be among the most important trends. He noted as evidence that ethnic diversity is intensifying throughout America and life expectancy is increasing rapidly. According to Clark, these changes will give seniors and concentrated ethnic populations significantly more political power in the years to come. But to close, he asked rhetorically whether

groups with disparate interests will forge an ability to work together towards meaningful policy goals.

Other speakers who also received Decade of Behavior (DOB) democracy research awards were political scientists David Epstein (Columbia University), James L. Gibson (Washington University in St. Louis), and Sharyn O'Halloran (Columbia University); psychologist Judith Torney-Purta (University of Maryland, College Park); and communications researcher Kathleen Hall Jamieson (University of Pennsylvania). Congressmen Brian Baird (D-WA), a psychologist, and Daniel Lipinski (D-IL), a political scientist, delivered brief remarks and presented the DOB awards.

AAG Briefing on Geographic Management Systems

On June 14, AAG Executive Director Douglas Richardson and three other distinguished speakers discussed "Building Geographic Management Systems: Tackling Critical Policy Needs for the Nation's Future." The AAG Congressional Briefing was sponsored in conjunction with the Consortium of Social Science Associations and was funded through the generous support of the Kellogg Foundation. Rep. Chris Cannon (R-UT) was the event's congressional sponsor.

Richardson described the central role geographic technologies now play in managing a wide range of government and private sector activities, including environmental, homeland security, and defense applications. He also discussed related locational privacy and civil liberties issues. Susan Wachter, professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of economics and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development for Policy Development and Research, focused on GIS as a key analysis tool for the health

and safety fields as well as for real estate analysis and economic forecasting. She also emphasized the importance of partnerships involving the academic, government, and business communities and "the need to cross boundaries for effective national and regional analysis of local needs, capabilities, and resources."

Akhlaque Haque, Director of Graduate Studies in Public Administration at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, discussed local government GIS usage and management. He asserted that "the piecemeal efforts of individual local governmental agencies, although quite noteworthy and significant, are far from becoming a cost-effective tool for public administration. GIS is here and we must embrace all it has to offer for optimal decision making in the 21st century." David Cowen, Chair of the Department of Geography at the University of South Carolina, concluded the congressional briefing by addressing federal GIS policy, programs, and workforce needs, as well as applications of geographic technologies to the transportation and energy fields. He stressed the importance of data sharing agreements throughout his presentation and warned that "there are many unsolved technical and institutional problems – we should have a unified approach to funding a robust GI Science agenda."

We at the AAG will continue our efforts to bring the results of geographic research to federal officials with the goal of supporting informed policy making. These congressional briefings are vital forums for educating congressional and agency staff on issues of importance to the geographic community. ■

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