Democrats Gain Control of Both House and Senate

A few days before the November 7 elections, Washington Post editorial cartoonist Tom Toles reminded readers about the Democrats’ recent penchant for finding ways to blow national elections. He depicted the Democratic donkey in the person of Charlie Brown, eager to kick the football being held by Lucy, representing voters nationwide and the bevy of polls showing the Democrats poised for substantial gains in both houses of Congress. But Toles’s warning notwithstanding, Lucy was true to her word this time, and she held the ball long enough for an emphatic boot by the party that hadn’t won a national election since 1996.

The Democrats seized control in the House, where they’re likely to end up with at least 232 of the 435 seats. In the Senate, razor-thin wins by Virginian Jim Webb and Montana’s Jon Tester gave the Democratic caucus fifty-one votes—just enough for control. As a result, when the new Congress convenes in early January, the House will be led by the nation’s first female Speaker, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). In the Senate, Harry Reid (D-NV) will guide a caucus featuring nine new members, reelected titans Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Ted Kennedy (D-MA), and several Senators with star power and presidential aspirations, including Evan Bayh (D-IN), Hillary Clinton (D-NY), and Barack Obama (D-IL).

While others will write about what the changes will mean for our nation and the world, I’ll try to offer just a few preliminary thoughts on what the elections will mean for geography and the science community. Most importantly, perhaps, the House Science and Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committees will no longer be deferential to a Bush administration that many Washington insiders assert has been extremely hostile to scientific endeavor. In addition, the new appropriations chairs in both houses of Congress are perhaps more likely to favor substantial increases for the National Science Foundation, the United States Geological Survey, the National Institutes of Health, the Census Bureau, and the other federal agencies that support basic research and data collection.

Also, while Rep.-elect Tim Walz (D-MN) will be the only member of the Democratic majority with direct ties to geography (see story below), there are several Democrats with social science backgrounds who have supported AAG activities in recent years and will continue to be useful allies in the coming months. For example, in 2005, Reps. Daniel Lipinski (D-IL), a political scientist, and Brian Baird (D-WA), a psychologist, were featured speakers at a Decade of Behavior congressional briefing sponsored in part by the AAG.

Another area that will likely see change as a result of the elections is education policy. While there has been substantially more bipartisan cooperation on education issues in the last six years than on other topics, the political shift will certainly bring a changed tone to Washington, especially as Congress readies to reauthorize No Child Left Behind, the administration’s name for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The AAG will work closely with our allies in the geography community to promote the geographic education bills under consideration and the overarching importance of geographic education.

January will be an interesting and historic time here in Washington. Stay tuned as new developments and policy shifts become clearer in the days ahead.

Geography Teacher Wins House Seat

Amid the attention given to close Senate races, various referenda, and other such matters this November, you may have missed the news that one of the House districts where a Democrat challenger unseated a Republican incumbent was the first district in Minnesota. But why should we care that Tim Walz defeated Gil Gutknecht by a 53%-47% margin? Because Tim Walz is a geography teacher at Mankato West High School in Mankato, Minnesota. With his wife, Walz also runs an educational travel business, through which he accompanies high school juniors and seniors on educational trips to China each summer.

It’s nice to know that there’s at least one new member of Congress who won’t have to be convinced that geography is an important subject in the schools and that enhanced geographic perspectives can be valuable in dealing with the nation’s and world’s issues. More information on Tim Walz may be obtained at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Walz.

Top Census Officials Resign; Confirmation Battle Could Ensur

On November 14, the two top officials at the U.S. Census Bureau resigned, potentially throwing 2010 Census preparations in disarray and setting up what could be a messy and protracted confirmation battle in the U.S. Senate. Census Director C. Louis Kincannon and Hermann Habermann, the Bureau’s Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer, did not provide a clear reason for their simultaneous departures, but signs suggested that Kincannon and Habermann felt they had lost influence within the Bush administration. Political insiders have suggested that the officials, both highly regarded statisticians, were targeted by Republicans intent on appointing replacements who would be less likely to favor sampling for the 2010 Census. Sampling is used primarily to estimate the true population size of hard-to-measure localities and tally unaccounted for residents. Its heaviest influence is typically felt in urban communities that tend to vote for Democratic congressional candidates. As a result, full implementation of sampling for the 2010 Census could strengthen inner-city representation at the expense of more moderate-to-conservative suburban and rural areas.

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degree program in cartography or GIS. Prior scholarship winners are eligible to apply in succeeding years, provided all appropriate criteria are satisfied. Scholarship applicants must be members of CaGIS.

For details and application forms, visit www.cartogis.org/awards/scholarship/. Applications must arrive at ACSM/CaGIS headquarters no later than 5:00 pm, December 15, 2006 to be considered.

Information on other CaGIS-sponsored awards is available at www.cartogis.org/awards.

**Historical Study in Pennsylvania**

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission invites applications for the 2007-08 Scholars in Residence Program, including applications for collaborative residencies. Residency programs are open to all who are conducting research on Pennsylvania history and provide support for up to eight weeks of full-time research and study in manuscript and artifact collections maintained by any commission facility. Stipends are awarded at the rate of $375 per week. For full details visit www.phmc.state.pa.us or call 717-787-3034. Deadline for applications is January 12, 2007.

**AAG International Geographic Information Fund Awards**

The AAG International Geographic Information Fund (IGIF) offers three types of awards: Student Travel Grants, Graduate Research Awards, and Student Paper Awards. These awards are intended to support full-time students who are currently registered in an undergraduate or graduate degree program at a duly accredited and recognized college, university, or other educational institution within the United States, and who are working in any area of spatial analysis or geographic information science and technology (GIS&T).

This year, one or more AAG-IGIF Student Travel Grants in the amount of approximately $500 will be awarded. Grant monies can be used for the support of student travel to national and international symposia or specialized meetings sponsored by recognized professional organizations associated with GIS&T.

Also, one or more AAG-IGIF Graduate Research Awards of up to $500 will be made in support of graduate research proposed by a student.

Additionally, one or more AAG-IGIF Student Paper Awards of up to $200 will be made in recognition of outstanding student papers in any area of GIS&T given at a national and international conference or specialized meeting sponsored by recognized professional organizations held during 2006.

Students interested in attending the “Geography in the Americas: Collaboration on Research and Education” conference in Chile, who meet IGIF requirements, are encouraged to apply.

For complete information on all IGIF awards visit www.aag.org/Grantsawards/IGIF.cfm.

To apply for an AAG-IGIF award, please submit completed application materials in an email attachment to grantsawards@aag.org with the title of the appropriate IGIF award in the subject line. Alternately, completed applications can be mailed to: Association of American Geographers, AAG-IGIF (fill in subject) Award, 1710 Sixteenth Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3198. The deadline for applications is December 31, 2006.

As of this writing, it’s unclear who the president will look to appoint to fill the vacancies. Habermann will leave the bureau in January regardless of whether his job has been filled. Typically, the deputy director position would be filled by a career civil servant, but making a political appointment is within the administration’s discretion. Kincannon, meanwhile, has agreed to stay at the bureau until his successor has been nominated and confirmed by the Senate. If President Bush appoints an individual distinctly opposed to sampling techniques, the nominee could face strong opposition in a Senate that will be controlled by the Democrats as of January. The AAG will keep close tabs on the nominations to replace Kincannon and Habermann as they are made.

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**Travel Grants Available for Students**

Student travel grants to attend the “Geography in the Americas: Collaboration on Research and Education” conference in Chile are now available. Interested students are urged to apply for travel funding through the AAG’s International Geographic Information Fund (IGIF) noted above. Additional travel funding is also available. For information visit www.geographyintheamericas.com/. The conference will be held May 21-26, 2007.