Policy Session Planned for Annual Meeting

The AAG is planning to hold a session during the 2008 Annual Meeting in Boston focused on geography education policy, and we hope you’ll be able to attend. The primary topic of the panel will be geography’s role in the No Child Left Behind law and the potential benefits new implementing programs and funding authorizations will have for our discipline. Also up for discussion will be the Higher Education Act, which has been moving through Congress recently. Participants will include a representative from Senator Kennedy’s Education Committee staff; Daniel Edelson, VP for Education and Children’s Programs at NGS; Howard Silver, Executive Director of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (of which the AAG is a member); myself, and others TBD. The session will be held on Friday, April 18, 2008.

Limited Window Remains for NCLB Action

As Congress returns from its holiday recess and begins the 2008 session, a limited window seems to remain for action on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization. While some momentum may be building for a debate on NCLB, it still remains unlikely that a compromise will be reached this year.

On January 7, President Bush delivered remarks highlighting the sixth anniversary of No Child. He used the occasion to signal some possible ground for compromise with Congress – for instance, the President said that he recognizes there’s a strong desire for giving the states and school districts more flexibility. He also stressed that he does not want the law to be viewed as a barrier to innovation. To this end, he expressed a willingness to rework the law’s accountability system by giving schools credit for achievement by individual students.

The President also promised to rework the system for measuring high school dropout rates and provide additional assistance to struggling schools. He did, however, threaten to veto any bill that undermines the law’s overall notion of accountability. The President also indicated that if the law is not reauthorized, he will ask Education Secretary Margaret Spellings to move forward with certain reforms that can be enacted administratively.

In response to the President’s comments, House Education Chair George Miller (D-CA) noted “I am glad to see that the President may finally be willing to acknowledge that we cannot simply stay the course when it comes to the No Child Left Behind law…Indeed, many of the priorities mentioned by the President…have long been under active consideration by our Committee.” Miller has in the past stated his intention to debate a reauthorization bill on the House floor in the early part of this year.

Proactive Policies Needed

The most important finding of the study is that proactive policies at all levels of government are needed to address the potential impacts of climate change in the Boston area. This is indicated by the fact that the “ride-it-out” approach to climate change adaptation is the least efficient of the three scenarios. According to the co-principal investigator Paul Kirshen of Tufts University, “The results show that taking anticipatory actions well before 2050 results in less total adaptation and impact costs to the region than taking no action. Because of the interrelations among infrastructure systems, we have found that it is critical to take account of the effect that an adaptation action designed to lessen the effect of climate change on one system has on other systems. For the most part these cross-system effects are complementary in nature. But there are important exceptions, so an integrated approach to adaptation policy formulation is needed. Furthermore, adaptation efforts must be chosen and implemented so as not to confound mitigation efforts.”

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