With Healthcare Reform Enacted, Administration Turns to NCLB

The Obama Administration recently released a new Blueprint for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (better known as No Child Left Behind or NCLB) in anticipation of Congressional action. (The full blueprint is available at www.whitehouse.gov.) As you are likely well aware, the importance of promoting geography education through No Child Left Behind has been and continues to be a critical issue for the AAG, and we will keep working to engage Congress during the upcoming reauthorization process. We will also work with Department of Education officials to promote attention to and funding for geography education as a core aspect of federal K-12 education policy. Readers interested in geographic education should turn to Doug Richardson’s From the Meridian column this month, which focuses on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (see page 2).

USGS Requests Small Budget Increase

With the recent release of the President’s FY 2011 budget obscured by the debate over healthcare reform, there has been a limited focus on agency funding requests to this point. With Congressional appropriators gearing up for their annual ritual, however, we will be paying closer attention in the next few columns to the budget battles affecting the agencies that fund geographic research.

In this spirit, the Department of the Interior’s budget requests $1.1 billion for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) for FY 2011. This marks a $21.6 million (2 percent) increase over the FY 2010 enacted level. In releasing the request, USGS Director Marcia McNutt asserted that “Science is a cornerstone for sound decision making. Today’s complex, interrelated natural resource issues – such as climate change, energy conservation and development, and water quality and availability – demand that policy makers and managers start with timely, unbiased science. The President’s budget supports that vital perspective.”

In the budget release, USGS spotlights a few of their key geography programs, including that “the Land Remote Sensing budget of $75.9 million will allow USGS to continue operations and maintenance for Landsats 5 and 7, and includes a program increase of $13.4 million to accommodate a new ground system requirements for the Landsat Data Continuity Mission.” The release also notes that “the 2011 National Geospatial program budget of $65.9 million will allow the program to continue to gain efficiencies, improve effectiveness, promote geographic research, leverage remote sensing technologies, and engage in partnerships to update geospatial data layers for the next generation USGS topographic map, a digital product made from The National Map data.” The section concludes by asserting that “research in Geography improves the understanding of the rates, causes, and consequences of natural and human-induced processes that shape and change the landscape over time, and will provide comprehensive information needed to understand the environmental, resource, and economic consequences of landscape change.”

The USGS Coalition – a Washington-based group of 70 national organizations in which the AAG participates – recently testified before the House Appropriations Committee and urged Congress to provide $1.3 billion for the agency for FY 2011. Testimony highlighted the unique interdisciplinary nature of USGS-supported research and pointed out that the Administration’s budget request is inadequate – especially in light of the overall 5.9 percent growth in non-Defense research and development accounts.

We will keep you up-to-date on other key program funding issues in future columns.

AAG Annual Meeting

In my new position as Senior Program Manager for Government Relations, I hope to connect with many of you at the upcoming AAG Annual Meeting and look forward to working with you in the coming weeks and months. Having the Annual Meeting take place in Washington, D.C. is truly a unique opportunity for all of us, and I hope it energizes our efforts to inform federal education policy.

I want to take this special opportunity to invite you to attend a panel session on geographic education policy and legislation at the Annual Meeting at 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, April 15, in the Thurgood Marshall East Room of the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. Our special guest will be Congressman Tim Walz, a former geography teacher. Also in attendance will be AAG President Elect Ken Foote, Mike Lach of the U.S. Department of Education, and AAG Executive Director Doug Richardson.

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