Annual Meeting Panel on K-12 Geography

I hope to be able to see many of you in New York City during the 2012 AAG Annual Meeting. We are in the process of finalizing a special session on the status of K-12 geography education funding, legislation, and policy. This special session has been scheduled for 12:40 – 2:20pm on Monday, February 27, 2012. The participants are:

- Myself, serving as Chair
- Saul Cohen, Regent, NY State Education Department & Former President, AAG
- Danny Edelson, Vice President for Education, National Geographic Society
- Wendy Gellman, Senior Council & Advisor for Outreach and Community Affairs, Office of U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
- Katie Campos, Assistant Secretary of Education, Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo (invited)
- Minna Elias, District Chief of Staff, Office of Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney

Endorsements of AAG K-12 Resolution

In related news, support continues to grow for the “AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education.” Five key individuals and organizations recently endorsed the document:

- The Honorable William S. Cohen: Cohen served as U.S. Secretary of Defense from 1997-2001 in the Clinton Administration. He also represented the people of Maine in both Houses of Congress, serving six years in the House and 18 in the Senate.
- The Honorable Robert M. Gates: Gates recently retired as U.S. Secretary of Defense after holding the job for five years. He served in the Cabinet for Presidents Bush and Obama and is the only person to stay on as Pentagon chief through a change in Administrations. Gates also served as Director of the CIA and as President of Texas A&M University during his career.
- Jane Goodall Institute: The Jane Goodall Institute is a global leader in chimpanzee behavioral research and protection, community-centered conservation, and youth service. The Institute has branches in many countries and its mission is to advance the power of individuals to take informed and compassionate action to improve the environment of all living things.
- American Council On Renewable Energy: ACORE, a non-profit membership organization, is dedicated to building a secure and prosperous America with clean, renewable energy. The Council provides a common educational platform for a wide range of interests in the renewable energy community, focusing on technology, finance and policy.
- Vice Admiral Dennis V. McGinn, USN, Ret.: Admiral McGinn’s career was highlighted by his assignment as Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Warfare Requirements and Programs. He also served as commander of the U.S. Third Fleet and is now President of the American Council on Renewable Energy.

We thank these leaders and groups for their support of geography education. In 2012, the AAG will continue to inform Congress of the value of geography education as it considers funding authorizations and appropriations for K-12 geography.

House Bill Would Harm Federal Grantmaking Process

The U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform has passed a bill that would have major adverse impacts on federal funding of scientific research. The Grant Reform and New Transparency (GRANT) Act, H.R. 3433, is being marketed by its sponsor, Rep. James Lankford (R-OK), as an effort to increase accountability in federal grant programs. But concerns have been raised about the legislation because of the significant consequences it would cause for the existing grant-making process.

Section 7404 of the bill deals with additional disclosures that would be required on Grants.gov or a similar and updated website. The troublesome aspects include:

- §7404(d)(2)(A) – For any research grant awarded by a federal agency, “a copy of the final grant agreement, including the terms and conditions and the time period for performance of the grant,” must be publicly posted. As written, the bill does not allow exceptions for national security or public safety reasons.
- §7404(d)(2)(B) – “A copy of any proposal, application, or plan submitted for (an) awarded grant” must also be publicly posted. Under this requirement, the agency is allowed to substitute an abstract or executive summary, for a period of up to three years, “if disclosure of the full proposal, application, or plan would (harm) an applicant.” Despite this exception, this mandate would seemingly open the door to the theft of intellectual property.
- §7404(d)(2)(E) – “The name, title, and employer of each individual who served as a peer reviewer for the grant program” must be posted. This is perhaps the most-troublesome aspect of the legislation. Federal grantmaking programs are successful in large part because of the confidentiality of the peer-review process.

The Oversight and Government Reform panel passed the GRANT Act without holding a hearing on the legislation. It is unclear if/when the bill will be brought up for consideration before the full House, but already the Association of American Universities, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the Council on Government Relations (a national association of research universities) have sent a joint letter to the Committee leadership that expresses opposition to H.R. 3433. The AAG has also agreed to sign onto a separate letter opposing the bill that is being organized by the Coalition for National Science Funding.

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