Environmental Groups Endorse AAG Education Resolution

The “AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education” has continued to garner support through a growing list of endorsements in recent weeks. The resolution explains the value and importance of geography education and urges policymakers to include geography and geospatial education in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) proposals; to include funding for geography education as part of a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and to enhance geography teacher training.

WiLDGOAST, an international environmental organization that works to conserve coastal and marine ecosystems and wildlife, has become the most recent of an expanding list of prominent environmental groups to endorse the resolution, joining the American Council On Renewable Energy, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Jane Goodall Institute, the National Council for Science and the Environment, and the U.S. Green Building Council. Founded in 2000, WiLDGOAST has conserved more than two million acres of coastal wildlands and wildlife habitat to date. We are grateful to WiLDGOAST and to each of these groups for their support.

We are also happy to announce that Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy (D) agreed to sign the resolution. He becomes the fifteenth incumbent governor to add his name to the document and we appreciate his endorsement of geography education.

Obama Signs Presidential Appointments Bill into Law

President Obama signed the Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act (S. 679) into law on August 10 as the culmination of a rare show of election year bipartisanship. I first reported on the bill, which primarily limits the number of presidential appointments requiring Senate confirmation, in my July-August 2011 column because it impacts two jobs of importance to geography:

• Under the law, the Census Director will now serve a fixed five-year term and each director is eligible to serve up to two terms in the position. Senator Tom Carper (D-DE) originally requested the change to somewhat isolate the job from political considerations.

• The law also ends the practice of Senate confirmation for appointees to the National Science Board (NSB). The fifteen-member NSB is the governing board for the National Science Foundation and members serve as policy advisors to the President and Congress.

2012 Election Predictions

In the spirit of political geography, I have made a practice of offering federal election predictions in the column, so without further ado, here are my fearless thoughts on the 2012 campaign. (Disclaimer: this is being written in early September just after the conclusion of the party conventions, but before the debates).

In 1992, then-Governor Bill Clinton and his staff were famous for using the line, “The economy, stupid!” when referring to the driving issue in that year's presidential contest. Most political pundits would probably agree that the 2012 election is also being guided by the economy, but as a practical matter, presidents have minimal control over the multitude of factors that shape economic trends.

So while President Obama and Governor Romney are spending much of their time discussing the economy, the winner in November will probably focus more on governing energy during their term on foreign policy, Supreme Court appointments, and education reform. That being said, this election is shaping up to be a close one and a number of key “swing states” will determine the ultimate outcome:

New Hampshire: Mr. Romney governed nearby Massachusetts and vacations in the Granite State, but New Hampshire is likely to join the rest of New England in supporting the President.

Nevada: Despite high unemployment, Nevada also appears likely to vote Democratic this year. The state’s voters tend to favor the President’s views on social issues and immigration policy.

Wisconsin: Governor Romney’s choice of Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan as his running mate hasn’t made a huge difference in polling here. The President is favored due to his support for the auto bailout and other issues.

Virginia: Virginia voted GOP in every presidential election from 1968 through 2004, but Mr. Obama broke the trend in 2008 and is likely to win the state again. The President is helped by Virgil Goode’s spot on the ballot as the Constitution Party candidate – Goode represented Virginia’s 5th District in Congress for twelve years and could siphon conservative votes away from the Romney campaign.

Iowa: The Hawkeye State has a number of culturally-conservative voters who favor the GOP, but President Obama appears likely to hold Iowa in 2012 in part because of manufacturing job growth in key parts of the state.

Colorado: Colorado had been a reliable Republican state, but the growth of the Denver metropolitan area and a related influx of socially-progressive voters have pushed it towards the Democrats. Obama is favored to win the state for a second time.

Ohio: The Buckeye state has been a reliable bellwether in presidential elections, and the President is the favorite in 2012 thanks to the auto bailout and manufacturing growth trends.

Florida: Mitt Romney appeared likely to win Florida through parts of 2012, but his selection of Paul Ryan and related Democratic attacks on GOP Medicare plans seem to have tilted the state very slightly towards the President. While it probably won’t be the closest state this year, Florida will again be a pivotal battleground.

North Carolina: I believe the Tar Heel State will be the closest contest on Election Day. The President won here in 2008 and just concluded a successful convention in Charlotte, but the state has historically voted Republican in presidential campaigns. If Governor Romney is to have any chance of winning in 2012, he must take North Carolina’s fifteen electoral votes.

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