Washington Monitor

RESTORE Act Includes Research Funding for Gulf States

It is no small secret that Washington has been mired in gridlock for much of the last two years. So it was at least somewhat surprising when agreement was reached in early July on a federal highway bill (H.R. 4348) that funds many transportation and related programs. Tucked away as part of that legislation (§§ 1601-1608) is the RESTORE (Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourism Opportunities, and Revived Economies) Act, provisions for expenditure of the funds that BP is paying to the government as a penalty for the 2010 Deepwater oil spill.

As of this writing, BP and the government have yet to reach a final settlement agreement, but it has been suggested that the penalty could be in the $15 billion range. Under §1605 of H.R. 4348, 2.5 percent of this money (likely hundreds of millions of dollars) will be made available to the affected states (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas) through grants to establish research centers of excellence to study topics related to impacts on the gulf area.

The bill specifies that each center shall focus on science, technology, and monitoring in at least one of the following disciplines:

- Coastal and deltaic sustainability, restoration and protection, including solutions and technology that allow citizens to live in a safe and sustainable manner in a coastal delta in the Gulf Coast Region.
- Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast Region.
- Offshore energy development, including research and technology to improve the sustainable and safe development of energy resources in the Gulf Coast Region.
- Sustainable and resilient growth, economic and commercial development in the Gulf Coast Region.
- Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico.

These centers will likely provide an opportunity for geographers to conduct critical research as the Gulf Region continues to deal with fallout from the tragic spill. Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), the Senate sponsor of the RESTORE Act, indicated that, “As demonstrated during the aftermath of the BP oil spill, there is a great need for coastal and oceans research. The centers of excellence that will be established by the Act will facilitate coordinated research efforts to help us respond to natural and manmade disasters with the best possible science.”

At this point, many details are still unclear as to how specific provisions of the legislation will be implemented, and much hinges on the amount of the settlement. A spokesman for Texas Governor Rick Perry’s office indicated that their state is in the early stages of coordinating a structure for implementation of the RESTORE Act and that more will be known once exact funding amounts provided under the law are clear. We will continue to provide updates on this important new source of government research funding as details emerge.

Support Grows for AAG Education Resolution

The “AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education” has continued to garner support this summer. 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.

In addition to the many geography organizations, environmental groups, and public officials who have already backed the resolution, the following have also endorsed the resolution recently:

- Governor Benigno Fitial, Northern Mariana Islands: Governor Fitial was first elected in 2005 and won a second term in 2009. He served previously in the Islands’ legislature and is the first Governor of Carolinian descent (a minority group with ancestry from the Yap and Chuuk islands groups in the present-day Federated States of Micronesia).
- The Boeing Company is a worldwide leader in the aerospace industry and is the largest U.S. exporter by value. Boeing was founded in 1916 and is one of the largest producers of commercial airplanes.
- General Motors Company is the world’s largest automaker by vehicle unit sales and is a top-ten mainstay in the annual Fortune 500 rankings. GM employs over 200,000 people worldwide and has over 22 percent of the U.S. automotive market share.
- Raytheon is a major American industrial corporation with core manufacturing concentrations in defense products and commercial electronics. The company has been based in Massachusetts since its incorporation in 1922.
- SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation) provides scientific, engineering, systems integration, and technical services and solutions to a wide range of government agencies and other customers.
- Southwest Airlines was first established in 1967 and is currently the largest low-cost carrier in the United States. Southwest operates more than 3,300 flights per day with service to 97 destinations in 42 states.

The full text of the resolution and a list of all endorsers can be found at www.aag.org/AAGEducationResolution. We are grateful to Governor Fitial and these leading companies for their support of geography education.

Congressional Spending Deal Reached

On July 31, Washington was abuzz with the news that House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) had agreed to continue government spending at current

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AAG’s SAGE Affinity Group Announces Initiatives for 2012-2013

The AAG’s Stand Alone Geographers (SAGE) Affinity group is planning several new initiatives for the 2012-2013 academic year. These initiatives were announced by the new co-chairs of SAGE, Amanda Rees of Columbus State University (rees_amanda@columbusstate.edu) and Brian E. Johnson of Auburn University Montgomery (brianjohnson@aum.edu).

First and foremost, SAGE encourages potential members to join and benefit from the community, support, and networking provided by the affinity group. Once a member of the AAG, it costs an additional $1 to join the SAGE Affinity Group. All stand-alone geographers, as well as those working in institutions with few geography-trained colleagues, are very welcome to join.

Second, to aid that networking, all existing and new SAGE members are welcomed and encouraged to sign up for SAGE emails through the AAG Knowledge Communities on the main AAG website. Having logged into www.aag.org, click Membership > Knowledge Communities > Set Email Preferences. Join SAGE and sign up for emails to share ideas on strengthening geography at your institution, to stay connected to the geography community, and to find collaborators or mentors outside your campus. AAG Knowledge Communities allow users to post notices, blog, share resources, and build a strong sense of community.

Third, SAGE recommends that all existing and new members submit information for the AAG Guide to Geography Programs in the Americas. The Guide welcomes listings from institutions with any geography course offerings, in addition to institutions that offer a minor, a concentration, and/or a full major. Getting listed in the Guide will help to make SAGES more visible to colleagues at other institutions. Contact guide@aag.org to submit information for the Guide.

Fourth, the SAGE co-chairs believe it is very important to develop a stronger presence for SAGES at the AAG’s regional meetings. For many SAGES, regional meetings are the only professional conference they attend. Thus, regional support for SAGE members is crucial. One example can be found in SEDAAG. For at least the last seven years, SAGE members have met for lunch during the Southeast Division AAG meeting. This group identifies one SAGE member (either at an academic institution, library, government, etc.) from the state in which the meeting is located, and sponsors her/his attendance at the regional meeting. SAGE encourages other regional conference attendees to organize informal meetings during their conferences, and recommend using the SAGE Affinity Group as a tool to begin regional networking. Presently SAGE is seeking a non-AAG member stand-alone geographer based in North Carolina to sponsor as a conference attendee at the upcoming AAG Southeast Division Meeting (please contact Amanda Rees at rees_amanda@columbusstate.edu if you have a person in mind), to be held November 18-20, 2012, in Asheville, North Carolina.

Finally, SAGE is making plans for the 2013 AAG Annual Meeting in Los Angeles. These plans include a suite of consecutive paper and panel sessions built around a keynote speaker and an informal reception for SAGE members. Within the next two years SAGE will produce a Successful SAGES Handbook, an online publication about surviving and often thriving as a SAGE. This online publication will be developed with assistance from the AAG and will be available for free to all SAGE members. To meet these goals, the SAGE Affinity Group will be putting out a call for papers for the AAG Annual Meeting in Los Angeles for one or more paper sessions. Those papers may be utilized in the handbook publication, or they may address other key issues important to SAGE members.

SAGE also seeks a senior faculty member with experience in growing her/his institution’s limited geography course offerings, all while remaining productive in research. If you are interested in contributing to the Successful SAGES Handbook and/or being included in a SAGE session at the AAG Annual Meeting, please contact Amanda Rees at Columbus State University (rees_amanda@columbusstate.edu). If you have a potential plenary speaker in mind, please contact Brian E. Johnson at Auburn University Montgomery (brianjohnson@aum.edu).

Co-chairs Rees and Johnson wish to thank the AAG for its ongoing support of stand-alone geographers. In 2013, the AAG will again help fund SAGE members who travel to the AAG Annual Meeting to participate in SAGE sessions as paper presenters or panelists. To register for the 2013 AAG Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, visit www.aag.org/annualmeeting.

levels for six months beyond the start of the 2013 federal fiscal year on October 1. The deal for a Continuing Resolution at FY 2012 spending levels is meant to alleviate fears among rank-and-file legislators that a budget shutdown could occur just as the election season enters its final month.

The agreement is a mixed bag for the accounts at the National Science Foundation and other agencies that include funding for geography research. The deal means there will not be any new sources of grant money available on the immediate horizon as colleges and universities across the nation continue to deal with diminished state funding. On the other hand, several House Republicans had signaled that they hoped to slash FY 2013 agency budgets, which could have caused significant cuts across the government, including to research accounts.

Even with the agreement, which must be formally voted upon, Congress will still have to deal with several key financial issues in a post-election Lame Duck session, such as the expiration of the so-called “Bush Tax Cuts” and the significant spending cuts that were imposed last year as part of a deal to raise the federal debt limit.

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