AAG Receives Key Endorsements for K-12 Geography Education Resolution

As readers of this column are well aware, the AAG has been a leading advocate in recent years for the importance of K-12 geography education. Last year, working closely with our friends in the geography and GIS communities, we developed an “AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education”—and the document was quickly endorsed by groups such as the National Geographic Society, the National Council for Geographic Education, and many others.

A more recent goal, however, has been to seek key supporters for the resolution from outside the geography community. Late last year, we were quite pleased that the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) decided to endorse the document. (See the January 2011 Washington Monitor for more on NASBE.) We have recently had other important successes that we want to share with you.

In February, I attended the Winter Meeting of the National Governors Association (NGA) and spoke to several Governors and their Chiefs of Staff about K-12 geography education and our resolution. Recently, two of these Governors have decided to sign on to the AAG’s resolution: Paul LePage (R-ME) and Rick Scott (R-FL). We are delighted by the decisions of these high-profile supporters and will continue to work with the NGA and other governors’ offices as we seek additional endorsements.

We also note that retired Navy Vice Admiral Robert Murrett has agreed to be listed as a supporter of the resolution. Vice Admiral Murrett is a former director of the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency and his impressive career as a naval officer also includes service as Director of Naval Intelligence and Vice Director of Intelligence for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, among many key assignments.

We are also pleased to share with you that Esri has signed the AAG resolution. Esri is, of course, a global leader in GIS software development and geodatabase management applications.

Congressman Endorses GeoEd Resolution in House

On a related note, Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger’s (D-MD) office has informed us that he will again be introducing the “AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education” as an official U.S. House resolution. Ruppersberger first took this action last year, and he wanted to reaffirm his commitment to K-12 geography education by reintroducing the resolution in the current 112th Congress. We are grateful to Congressman Ruppersberger for his support.

We will continue to keep you up to date as more key endorsements are made. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have recommendations as to who we might reach out to for additional support.

AAG Monitoring Key Impacts of Congressional Budget Deal

The AAG, working with our friends in the Washington advocacy community, has been monitoring the repercussions of the Fiscal Year 2011 budget deal. Recently, the association signed a letter compiled in part by the Consortium of Social Science Associations (of which the AAG is a member) that expresses concern about deep cuts to the U.S. Department of Education’s Fulbright-Hays programs.

The programs support international and foreign language studies and received a cut of 40 percent from their existing $126 million budget. This harmful cut of about $50 million could be devastating to many important programs. The letter is addressed to Education Secretary Arne Duncan, who will have discretion as to how the cuts are enacted.

We will continue to monitor other impacts of the budget compromise and work with other like-minded national organizations to respond.

Seattle Policy Session on Geography Education

It was good to see so many friends and colleagues in Seattle. Each year at the Annual Meeting, I am reminded of the many meaningful connections I have been able to make during my time at the AAG—thanks to each of you for your friendship, suggestions, and ongoing support!

I am pleased to report that we organized and hosted a successful policy session at the Annual Meeting that focused on K-12 geography education. Susan Gallagher Heffron and I introduced the session by sharing some perspectives on AAG activities and the successes we have had in informing key policymakers about the importance of geography education and spatial thinking—often with the assistance of AAG members.

Mary Conway, a community outreach staffer from the office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) discussed the importance of constituent support and stressed that any AAG member can make a difference by reaching out to his or her congressional representatives about K-12 geography education or any other topic. She noted that she would be spending time with Senator Murray in the week following the AAG Annual Meeting and that she would tell the Senator about her discussions on geography education in Seattle and the importance of greater federal support for K-12 geography.

During the panel session, Alan Burke, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction for the State of Washington, and Kelly Martin of the Superintendent’s staff talked about work going on in their state and related efforts at the national level around developing common educational standards. They noted that geography is often lumped in with history and social studies and that we should work to promote an understanding of the importance of spatial education—both for general learning and as related to improving a student’s job prospects. We couldn’t agree more. Thanks again to everyone who participated in the panel and to those of you who attended the session.

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