

AAG Newsletter of the Association of American Geographers

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The "AAG Washington Monitor"

Executive Director's Note: With this column, I am pleased to introduce John Wertman, the AAG's new Director of Public Policy, and also to welcome you to this first edition of the "AAG Washington Monitor," a new feature of the AAG Newsletter designed to help keep AAG members up to date on current federal legislative activity related to geography, and more generally, to education and science policy.

John comes to the AAG from COSSA (the Consortium of Social Science Associations), where he lobbied and reported on a broad range of social science issues, including those pertaining to geography. John also has had experience working in both the White House and on Capitol Hill.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions as we evolve the "AAG Washington Monitor." We also hope that as part of this ongoing educational process, we will increase the awareness of federal activity important to geography and ultimately have an impact on these issues which so directly affect geography and geographers. Below is an introduction to a few of the issues we will be following in the coming months.

—DBR

Higher Education Act

The Higher Education Act (HEA), which was last revised in 1998, is currently up for reauthorization. First passed in 1965, the HEA is a crucial piece of legislation. It is wide reaching in scope and deals with many key higher education programs, including social and cultural barriers to higher education access, student loans, Pell Grants, teacher education grants, graduate student opportunities, and international education programs.

While the act expires this year, it appears increasingly likely that Congress won't finish the reauthorization process until 2005. Under this scenario, money could still be appropriated to existing HEA programs but needed revisions to the law would be forestalled for the time being. The congressional delay is due largely to the November elections, which have impeded action on several legislative fronts.

The House has progressed further along the reauthorization path than the Senate. Key representatives, including John Boehner (R-OH), Chairman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, made the decision early on to split the major sections of the HEA into separate bills, including:

- Teacher loan forgiveness (H.R. 438—has passed the House)
- Teacher education/ preparation (H.R. 2211—has passed the House)
- Graduate opportunities: revamping the Javits Fellowships, the Thurgood Marshall Legal Opportunity Program, and Graduate Assistance in Areas on National Need (H.R. 3076—has passed the House)



Wertman

- International education programs: renewing most programs, but creating an advisory board to oversee curriculum and international education programs (H.R. 3077—has passed the House)
- Support for minority-serving institutions (H.R. 3180—pending in the House Committee on Education and the Workforce)
- College costs, federal student-aid programs, Pell Grants (H.R. 4283—was just introduced on May 5; the bill was referred to Boehner's committee, where hearings have already been held.)

In the Senate, the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions has held three hearings on issues related to the reauthorization. Despite this, Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH), the HELP Committee Chairman, has yet to introduce comprehensive reauthorization legislation.

No Child Left Behind

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

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Act into law. NCLB is the most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The No Child legislation recognizes the importance of geographic education by listing geography as one of ten "core academic subjects," but geography is the only one of the ten with no associated funding or specific program provisions. In the coming months, I and the AAG will be working with our friends and colleagues at GENIP and throughout the geography community in an attempt to correct this. As the NCLB act is unlikely to be reauthorized for several years, we will be examining a range of opportunities to provide needed funding for geography education through related congressional activity.

FY 2005 Budget/Appropriations

As in recent years, the federal budget and appropriations situation on Capitol Hill is very unsettled. In February, President Bush sent a proposed fiscal year (FY) 2005 budget of \$2.4 trillion to Congress for its consideration. This budget was delivered just two weeks after Congress had finally completed work on FY 2004 appropriations.

Complicating this year's appropriations process is the fact that the Senate has yet to pass a budget resolution. The budget resolution sets an enforceable ceiling on federal spending and can effectively head off legislative amendments that would increase government outlays. Republicans have a 51-49 edge in the Senate, but Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN) has been unable to hold four of his key moderates to the party line on the resolution. Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Susan Collins (R-ME), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) all rejected the GOP leadership's version of the measure, which weakened proposed language requiring any new tax cuts to be offset by corresponding spending cuts or revenue increases.

If no budget resolution is passed, it could lead to havoc as Republicans and Democrats alike will likely offer scores of amendments to the appropriations bills in an attempt to boost favored accounts. The president's budget proposal holds a hard line on discretionary spending that isn't related to defense or homeland security. Funding for accounts in this nondefense or security category would increase by only 0.5 percent overall in FY 2005 and House leaders are aiming for an even-lower spending ceiling.

National Science Foundation

Despite the hard line on overall spending in the administration's proposal, things aren't quite as bad at the National Science Foundation (NSF). The foundation's proposed budget is \$5.745 billion, up \$167 million or 3 percent from the FY 2004 appropriation of \$5.578 billion. Within this amount, there is an even bigger increase for the Research and Related Activities Account (up 4.7 percent), which includes funding for all of NSF's research directorates. The Geography and Regional Sciences program falls under the Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences Division (BCS), which is part of the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE). Under the administration's proposal, the SBE account would increase 10.3 percent and BCS would get a 10.9 percent boost. While these numbers are promising and several key leaders on the Hill, including Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R-AK), have expressed their desire to do all *Washington Monitor* from page 2 they can for NSF this year, the tight federal budget climate has dampened the optimism that reigned in the science community just a year and a half ago. On December 19, 2002, President Bush signed into law the NSF Reauthorization Act of 2002, which called for the doubling of the agency's budget over five years. Huge annual deficits, however, caused by homeland security concerns, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and massive tax cuts have eliminated the promise of large-scale NSF increases.

National Endowment for the Humanities

For the second year in row, the president is proposing a large increase for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). This is to support the We the People Initiative, a program designed to encourage and strengthen the teaching, study, and understanding of American history, culture, and ideas. For FY 2004, the administration asked for \$25 million for the program but Congress appropriated \$9.9 million. The FY 2005 request is for \$33 million. We will be working with the National Humanities Alliance and others to encourage NEH to support studies that include a consideration of place and geography in their methodology or focus.

While the NEH, NSF, and the rest of the federal government face fiscal uncertainty for FY 2005, the long-term budget picture

should clear up some once the results of the November elections are known. Stay tuned!

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