



Association of American Geographers

1710 Sixteenth Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20009-3198
Voice 202-234-1450
Fax 202-234-2744
gaia@aag.org
http://www.aag.org

AAG Councillors

President

Mona Domosh
Dartmouth College

Vice President

Sarah Bednarz
Texas A&M University

Secretary

Laura Smith
Macalester College

Treasurer

Grant Saff
Hofstra University

Past President

Julie Winkler
Michigan State University

Stuart Aitken

San Diego State University

Lesley-Ann Dupigny-Giroux
University of Vermont

Melissa R. Gilbert
Temple University

Ron Hagelman
Texas State University

John Harrington, Jr.
Kansas State University

J.M. Shawn Hutchinson
Kansas State University

Richard Kujawa
St. Michael's College

Thomas Maraffa
Youngstown State University

Florence M. Margai
Binghamton University – SUNY

Scott A. Mensing
University of Nevada Reno

Thomas Mote
University of Georgia

Bradley Rundquist
University of North Dakota

Grant Saff
Hofstra University

Laura Smith
Macalester College

Jeremy Tasch
Towson University

Elizabeth A. Wentz
Arizona State University

Executive Director
Douglas Richardson

January 30, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Congratulations on your new leadership role with the HELP Committee. As the 114th Congress gets under way, we want to applaud your immediate focus on K-12 education and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It is our hope that the final Senate bill will include a much-needed focus on the teaching and learning of geography.

Geography is one of the nine core K-12 subjects as identified in No Child Left Behind, but it is the sole core field that does not have an authorizing program in the law to promote its instruction. As a result of this lack of Federal funding and attention, only 17 states require a stand-alone geography course in middle school and only ten states require a stand-alone geography course in high school.

While we appreciate and understand your focus on giving states flexibility in a new law, we are deeply concerned that the continued lack of a dedicated geography funding program in the ESEA will have a strongly-negative impact on the U.S. economy. Geographic learning is critical as students build the spatial skills needed for careers in the rapidly-growing geospatial technologies field, which the U.S. Department of Labor has designated as one of the three most-important emerging and evolving fields in the tech industry.

In recent years, we have been circulating the enclosed *AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education*, which urges Congress “to include authorizations and appropriations for geography education consistent with other core academic subjects for K-12, as part of a reauthorized ESEA.” To this point, the Resolution has been endorsed by 20 bipartisan incumbent governors; 25 Fortune 500 companies, including huge Tennessee employers Nissan, Lockheed Martin, and FedEx; four former U.S. Secretaries of State; 14 retired four-star U.S. military officers; and many other prominent individuals and organizations.

When we asked James Baker to endorse the document, he told us: “*During my time as Secretary of State, I witnessed firsthand how important it was that Americans understood geography and the world around them. Since then, as countries have become even more*

interconnected, that need has grown. As a result, I support the efforts by the AAG to promote geography education in our schools, and I encourage the White House and Congress to do the same.” As someone who served with you in President Bush’s Cabinet, we agree completely with Secretary Baker’s comments.

In addition to this growing support for federal funding for geography education, a transformative event has occurred that makes attention to this issue especially critical. Esri, the largest GIS software company, has made a \$1 billion donation of its products available to all U.S. elementary and secondary schools, public and private. This initiative, which is aimed at strengthening K-12 STEM education, has the power to drastically improve college and career readiness of U.S. students in a critical technology field.

We are doing our part to support this incredible gift by setting up an Esri-authorized nationwide geomentoring network of specially-trained educators. But Esri’s laudable efforts will only succeed if you and other policymakers provide needed funding and support to enable states and school districts to better invest in geography and geospatial education. Now is the time to act – boosting proficiency in this field will undoubtedly enhance economic development across the nation.

The AAG is a nonprofit scientific, research, and educational society with a current membership of over 10,500 individuals from more than 60 countries. Our members are geographers and related professionals who work in the public, private, and academic sectors to advance the theory, methods, and practice of geography. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions about our organization or these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Richardson".

Douglas Richardson, PhD
Executive Director