

AAG Washington Monitor

Final Appropriation Bills Passed: Student Aid and NIH Fare Poorly

Just before the Christmas holiday, the House and Senate gave final approval to 2005's most contentious appropriation bills, including spending measures covering student aid and health research programs. The bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor-H) finally passed its last hurdle in the late night hours of December 21 after weeks of contentious debate but left many lawmakers feeling dissatisfied. Members in both chambers had complained about the restrictive spending limits placed on the bill, which provides much of the federal aid to the poor.

To add to the bad news, the defense spending bill, which passed on December 22, mandates an across the board (ATB) cut of one percent to all discretionary federal programs, including many of those in the Labor-H bill. The defense measure, which is usually one of the first to pass through Congress each fall, was finally completed only after the Senate rejected an attempt by Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) to attach language to the bill that would have opened drilling in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The bill had also been bogged down by debate over the ATB spending cut and a tussle between Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) and the White House over detainee treatment and torture, a battle the White House ultimately lost.

Two key items included in the Labor-H bill are: 1) a freeze on most student aid programs. The maximum Pell Grant award will remain at \$4,050 despite attempts by the Bush Administration to boost the amount; and 2) the first cut (incorporating the ATB) in the overall National Institutes of Health (NIH) appropriation since 1964. The NIH is the largest source of federal funds for university research. The Senate has wanted to increase NIH funding by \$1 billion, but House leaders prevailed as part of their effort to

curtail federal spending. Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA), a key congressional moderate, echoed the comments of many of his colleagues when he called the Labor-H bill's spending levels "grossly inadequate."

Also passed on December 21 was the budget reconciliation bill, which was discussed in last month's *AAG Washington Monitor*. The bill, which incorporates large chunks of the Higher Education Act reauthorization, was passed only after Vice President Cheney cast a tie-breaking fifty-first vote on its behalf in the Senate. Due to a technical point raised by Senate Democrats, however, the bill will have to be passed again in the House, where the vote is expected to be very close.

Alexander Criticizes Political "One-Sidedness"

On December 9, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), the former U.S. Secretary of Education, used his testimony before the Commission on the Future of Higher Education to condemn "the growing political one-sidedness which has infected most campuses, and an absence of true diversity of opinion." Alexander called this phenomenon, which he offered little hard evidence of, "the greatest threat to broader public support and funding for higher education."

To back his position, Alexander noted that most faculties express liberal views and that most faculty members vote Democratic. He also asked rhetorically how many conservatives are invited to deliver commencement addresses and how many bright, young faculty members are encouraged to research the virtues of vouchers or charter schools. According to an account of the session by *Inside Higher Ed*, several panel members noted privately that they were bothered by the Senator's assertions.

Alexander also called for U.S. presidents to appoint a lead adviser who would oversee "all of the federal government responsibilities for higher education" and he urged the adoption of proposals to

bolster science and technology research and education. For more on the commission, please see the November 2005 edition of *AAG Washington Monitor*.

Ruling Seen as a Major Blow against Intelligent Design

On December 20, U.S. District Judge John Jones ruled that the teaching of "intelligent design" violates the constitutional separation of church and state. The case was brought because the Dover Area (PA) School District wanted to become the first in the nation to require teaching the concept of intelligent design as an alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution. When the district passed the policy in October 2004, it described evolution as a theory that "is not a fact." The school board had specifically mandated the new teaching for ninth-grade biology classes and ordered school libraries to purchase an alternative textbook.

The judge's ruling supports local public opinion about the curriculum change—Dover area voters had already replaced eight of the nine school board members who were in office when the change was implemented with candidates who pledged to eliminate the new policy. Interestingly, Jones is an appointee of President Bush. The judge noted that the case came before him "as the result of activism of an ill-informed faction on a school board, aided by a national public interest law firm eager to find a constitutional test case on intelligent design, who in combination drove the board to adopt an imprudent and ultimately unconstitutional policy." Eight families had sued the school district in an effort to have the policy overturned. They argued, and Jones agreed, that the concept of intelligent design is inherently religious, not scientific. ■

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Geographer Provides Congressional Testimony on Katrina Disaster

On November 10, former AAG President Susan Cutter, Carolina Distinguished Professor of Geography and Director, Hazards Research Lab at the University of South Carolina, joined three other distinguished social scientists in testifying at a House Science Research Subcommittee on "The Role of Social Science Research in Disaster Preparedness and Response." The AAG worked with the committee and other organizations such as COSSA to ensure that geography would be represented at the hearing. The hearing was called to assess the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina and other recent disasters.

At the outset, Cutter noted that "Starting with Gilbert White's floodplain studies in the 1740s and continuing today, geographers have provided the scientific basis for disaster and hazard reduction policies and contributed to the nation's understanding of the regional variability in hazardousness." She added that "vulnerability science is an emergent multidisciplinary field that requires a place-based understanding of the interactions between natural systems, the built environment, and human systems." She pointed to three examples of social science contributions to the understanding of vulnerability science, drawn largely from the field of geography: a) the improvement in the metrics, models, and methods for social vulnerability assessments; b) the area of integrated hazards assessment methodology; and c) the area of warnings and evacuation behavior.

The subcommittee's ranking member, Rep. Diane Hooley (D-CA), picked up on Cutter's testimony and that of the other panelists in noting: "We have good research in this area—our witnesses today are proof of that. Now, I want to enable the translation of that research into real-world practice. As a federal government, we must honestly assess what is working and what isn't working. We must ask ourselves if there are impediments to applying the social and behavioral sciences research findings to the disaster planning, recovery, and

response activities of the responsible public and private sector organizations. If there are barriers, we've got to knock them down and get to work."

The full text of Cutter's remarks and additional information about the hearing is available on the web at www.house.gov/science/hearings/research05/nov%2010/index.htm.

AAG Joins New Congressional Hazards Caucus

In related news, the AAG recently agreed to join and play a leadership role in the new Congressional Hazards Caucus. An original Hazards Caucus was created in 2000 by Sen. Ted Stevens (R-AK) and then Sen. John Edwards (D-NC) to provide ways for governments at all levels to better prepare for and help mitigate the costs of natural disasters. Today, the new caucus provides members of Congress with information and education on preparing for, mitigating against, responding to, and recovering from natural and man-made disasters. As a result of the AAG's efforts, the mission of the new caucus also includes "demonstrating the ability of new technologies, such as geographic information systems, to address societal challenges faced by state and local government and the private sector" and improving understanding of society's need to prepare for disasters of all types.

The bipartisan, newly bicameral caucus is led by four co-chairs in the Senate: Stevens and Senators Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Jim DeMint (R-SC), and Ben Nelson (D-NE); and four co-chairs in the House: Reps. Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), Dennis Moore (D-KS), Jo Bonner (R-AL), and Zoe Lofgren (D-CA). The caucus includes more than sixty organizational members, including professional, scientific, and engineering societies, relief organizations, higher education associations, institutions of higher learning, trade associations, and private companies.

Typical caucus events include Capitol Hill briefings, roundtable discussions, special forums, and receptions. The caucus is online at www.hazardscaucus.org/.

HEA Attached to Reconciliation Bill; Geo-Ed Bill Currently Stalled

The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee's reauthorization proposal for the Higher Education Act (HEA) has been attached to the Senate version of the reconciliation bill, which deals with federal spending measures. The House's version of the budget reconciliation contains only the HEA's student aid sections. While developments at the end of any congressional session are always fast moving and unpredictable, it's possible the congressional leadership may seriously try to pass the HEA, using either the reconciliation bill or the Defense Department's appropriation bill as a vehicle. Either way, the chambers would have to resolve the serious differences that still exist on the law's Title VI (international studies), which may prove an insurmountable hurdle in such a short period of time. For more on the HEA, please refer to the October 2005 AAG *Washington Monitor*.

Meanwhile, supporters of the Teaching Geography is Fundamental Act (S. 1376), a bill aimed at expanding geographic literacy among students in kindergarten through grade twelve, decided against using the HEA as a vehicle for their legislation. Together with others led by the National Geographic Society, the AAG plans to renew the push for the act next year and are adding Senate sponsors in the meantime. For a full account of S. 1376, please see the September 2005 edition of the AAG *Washington Monitor*.

Torrieri Promoted at Census

AAG Member and geographer Nancy Torrieri has been appointed Chief of the American Community Survey (ACS) Outreach and Analysis Staff. She first joined the Census Bureau in 1986 and most recently led outreach and education initiatives for the ACS and has ably managed the Survey's Federal Agency Information Program. Our congratulations to Nancy! ■

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BLS Terminates Collection of Labor Data on Women Workers; AAG Responds

On August 29, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced that it had recently decided to suspend the collection of data on women workers as part of the Current Employment Statistics Survey (CES). The move has drawn criticism from women's organizations as well as a number of academic associations, including the AAG.

The CES is a monthly nationwide survey of payroll records that covers over 300,000 U.S. businesses. Only one question in the survey is devoted to women workers—it asks for the total number of women employed at a given business. The BLS gave three reasons for the discontinuation of this question: 1) it imposed a significant reporting burden on survey respondents because payroll records do not typically include gender identification; 2) the women worker data were little used; and 3) BLS will continue to provide extensive labor market information on women, primarily through its monthly survey of 60,000 households (the Current Population Survey, or CPS).

The BLS justifications notwithstanding, the AAG has submitted a letter to Kathleen Utgoff, Commissioner at BLS, requesting that data on women workers continue to be collected. In addition, the Institute for Women's Policy Research, a public policy research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on issues of critical importance to women and their families, has written a letter to members of Congress informing them of the change and the need to restore data

collection. On October 12, the AAG agreed to sign on to the letter, which states:

- *There is no adequate replacement for the CES:* CPS data will not provide an acceptable substitute. One former BLS commissioner noted that the CES "provides more reliable information on the current trend of wage and salary employment" than the CPS.
- *The CES Survey is not burdensome for businesses:* The only organizations representing businesses that submitted comments to BLS about the discontinuation of this data collection all supported continuing the data collection. Not only are businesses able to respond to these queries easily, but the record shows that they want the data collection to continue.
- *Researchers Use This Important Data:* Many of the thousands of comments submitted to BLS in support of this data collection came from researchers at such organizations as the New York Federal Reserve Bank and the Consortium of Social Science Associations (including sociologists, political scientists, and others). (The AAG is a COSSA member.)

Commission on the Future of Higher Education

In a September 19 speech at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced the creation of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The nineteen-member panel is charged with developing a comprehensive long-range national strategy for postsecondary education and will submit a final report with specific findings and recommendations to Secretary Spellings

by August 1, 2006. It is the Bush Administration's first significant foray into higher education policy after five years in office devoted primarily to K-12 education and the signature No Child Left Behind legislation.

In general, leaders of the higher ed community have expressed pleasure that the administration is finally focusing on postsecondary issues. A few concerns, however, have been raised and bear watching in the coming months. There is some fear that the work of the commission will lead to increased federal intrusion into higher education. Additionally, there have been many questions raised about the membership of the body. Unlike past federal commissions, which have been primarily composed of and led by members of the academic community, the current panel includes five corporate executives and is chaired by Charles Miller, a private investor. This makeup raises the concern that the commission's recommendations are going to be focused on reworking higher ed as a training ground for business jobs.

Of note to the geographic community is that David Ward, President of the American Council on Education and former President of the AAG, is a member of the panel. The first meeting of the commission took place on October 17 in Washington, but served primarily as an introductory session. AAG staff will monitor future meetings of the commission, reach out to and work closely with various commissioners, and comment as appropriate on important topics raised for discussion. ■

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Deadline for PG Book Review Editor Nominations Extended.

Please submit applications or nominations to profgeog@aag.org by Nov. 17, 2005.

See www.aag.org for details.

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Senate Finally Takes Up Higher Ed Act

In recent weeks, Senate watchers have been captivated by the confirmation hearings for Chief Justice-nominee John Roberts. Nonetheless, the Senate has succeeded in also confronting other pending business and on September 8, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee finally held a mark-up on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The House Education and Workforce Committee passed a separate version of the legislation (H.R. 609) in July following a contentious three days of debate and votes.

By contrast, the Senate bill (S. 1614) was co-sponsored by HELP Chairman Michael Enzi (R-WY) and Ranking Member Ted Kennedy (D-MA) and passed the committee by a vote of 20-0.

While Kennedy did say that panel Democrats were unhappy with a few provisions in the bill which they would try to address on the Senate floor, it was clear at the quick mark-up session that the numerous hours of bipartisan work that went into crafting the legislation had paid dividends. Among the bill's key provisions:

- The income cut-off for the Pell Grant program would increase from \$15,000 to \$20,000. The maximum award would also increase to \$6,300 over a five-year period.
- The fixed interest rate for consolidated student loans would remain at 6.8 percent, but the fixed rate on loans to parents would increase from 7.9 percent to 8.5 percent.
- A fellowship program would be created to encourage women and minorities to pursue careers in the academy.

- Changes would be made to simplify student financial aid processes.

It remains unclear when either house of Congress will vote on the committee bills. Following the votes, the conference process—which reconciles differences in the House and Senate bills—could prove quite difficult and acrimonious.

Prospects for the geography education bill (S. 1376) are still uncertain—it remains unclear whether the legislation will be attached to the HEA. We at the AAG are in close contact with the National Geographic Society and others supporting the bill. (For more on S. 1376, please see last month's AAG Washington Monitor). ■

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Chicago and its Inland Sea from page 6

was not developed until, on January 2, 1900, engineers finally reversed the flow of the Chicago River. Today, locks at the entrance to Lake Michigan, and on the Des Plaines, twenty-eight miles away, control diversion rates and prevent floodwaters from "backing" into the lake.

Chicago continues working to protect its water supply with the "Deep Tunnel Project," formally known as TARP (the Tunnel and Reservoir Plan). Chicago shares a combined sewer system with over fifty surrounding suburbs. During extreme precipitation events, storm run-off from these sewers added to normal sewage loads may total five billion gallons a day, exceeding the treatment system's capacity by 250 percent. TARP consists of 109 miles of underground reservoirs designed to intercept and store this run-off, and release it in a controlled fashion after rain has ended. The TARP project is ongoing, and the Local Arrangements Committee hopes to showcase this incredible facility.

Finally, water levels in the Great Lakes are now near historic lows and proposals to divert water are increasing rapidly.

Over 118 suburban communities, for example, get their water directly from the Chicago water system, and southern Lake Michigan communities are estimated to see a 21 percent increase in population by the year 2030. Chicago's western neighbor, Kane County, by itself expects to see water use increase from 67 million gallons per day (mgd) to 120 mgd over the next twenty-five years. These trends are of critical importance to the entire metropolitan area, and for such reasons Chicago will continue to participate in regional water-planning programs such as the Southern Lake Michigan Regional Water Consortium (www.nipc.org/environment/slmrWSC/overview.htm).

To a true Chicagoan however, the lake is more than the sum of its engineering facilities and water management agreements. Those who grew up here often remember mornings where one could "feel" the lake from miles away. Even if one comes to the city later in life, in one way or another, the lake can call, and you develop—sometimes without being aware of it—an awareness, a

relationship. You orient yourself in regard to the lake; it burrows beneath the level of your conscious mind.

Ben Hecht, the playwright and reporter, spent many years working for the *Chicago Daily News*. In one of his columns, he wrote:

"It is when one leaves the city and goes to visit in another place where there is no lake that the lake grows alive One becomes thirsty for it and dreams of it. One remembers it then as something that was almost an essential part of life, like a third dimension. In some ways one associates one's day dreams with the lake and falls into thinking that there is something unfinished, sterile, about living with no lake at one's elbow."

The AAG invites you to explore this "third dimension," and learn of the myriad ways in which Chicago and its inland sea have influenced each other. ■

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Geography Education Bill Introduced in Senate

On July 11, Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), with co-sponsors Ted Stevens (R-AK), John Warner (R-VA), Chris Dodd (D-CT), Daniel Akaka (D-HI), and Conrad Burns (R-MT), introduced legislation (S. 1376) aimed at expanding geographic literacy among students in kindergarten through grade twelve. Specifically, the bill authorizes an appropriation of up to \$15 million a year for the next four federal fiscal years for the U.S. Secretary of Education to issue a grant to a "national nonprofit education organization (or a consortium of organizations) that has as its primary purpose the improvement of the quality of student understanding of geography through effective teaching of geography in the Nation's classrooms."

The grantee organization or consortium would be charged with spending twenty-five percent of the award amount to: (1) strengthen and expand the grantee's relationships with institutions of higher education and state and local agencies with a commitment to geography education; (2) to support and promote research-based training of teachers of geography and related disciplines in kindergarten through grade twelve; (3) to support research on effective geography teaching practices and the development of assessment instruments and strategies to document student understanding of geography; (4) to convene national conferences on geography education to assess the current state of geographic literacy; and (5) to develop and disseminate appropriate research-based materials to foster geographic literacy.

The grantee would use the other seventy-five percent of the funds to award sub-grants to higher education institutions associated with a state geographic alliance, a nonprofit educational organization, or a state or local educational agency. The sub-grant recipients would then be charged with using their funding for purposes such as conducting teacher training programs that use effective

and research-based approaches to the teaching of geography at the kindergarten through grade twelve level; applying Geographic Information Systems (GIS) or other geographic technological tools to the teaching of geography; promoting research in geography education, emphasizing research that leads to improving student achievement; fostering comparative studies of world cultures, economies, and environments; and developing effective, research-based geography learning materials.

The legislation was drafted and introduced thanks in part to the hard work of the National Geographic Society (NGS). The bill, in its findings section, points to a nine-country National Geographic-Roper survey of geographic literacy among young adults aged eighteen through twenty-four, in which Americans ranked second to last. We at the AAG look forward to working with the NGS and others to promote the legislation and we'll keep you apprised of any developments. The full text of the bill can be accessed at www.aag.org/geoedbill.

Climate Change Inquiry Provokes Scientific Community Response

On June 23, Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), Chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, sent letters to three climate change scientists – Michael Mann of the University of Virginia, Malcolm Hughes of the University of Arizona, and Raymond Bradley of the University of Massachusetts – asking the individuals detailed scientific questions about their recent studies, in addition to asking for extensive information about their life's work. Barton also sent a separate letter to the National Science Foundation (NSF) asking NSF for information on the work of the three scientists as well as a list of all grants the foundation has made in recent years in the areas of climate and paleoclimate science.

Barton's action is a rare foray by a politician into the peer review process. As an example of the level of inquiry in Barton's letters, he asked Mann,

Bradley, and Hughes for the "location of all data archives relating to each published study" and is requiring them to provide answers to such detailed questions as whether the scientists calculated "the R2 statistic for the temperature reconstruction, particularly for the 15th Century proxy record calculations."

The reaction from the scientific community in Washington has been firm in its opposition to Rep. Barton's activities. American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) CEO Alan Leshner has written to Barton expressing deep concern about the congressman's actions and questioning whether the chairman's "approach is good for the processes by which scientific finding on topics relevant to public policy are generated and used." Ralph Cicerone, President of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), asserted in a separate letter to Barton later that "a congressional investigation, based on the authority of the House Commerce Committee, is probably not the best way to resolve a scientific issue." The NAS also offered to "create an independent expert panel to assess the state of scientific knowledge" in the climate field.

In addition, House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) has been one of Barton's most active and vocal opponents. Boehlert sent Barton a sharply worded letter criticizing the "illegitimate investigation you have launched." Boehlert also raised legal issues dealing with committee jurisdictions and called Barton's actions "chilling."

Consistent with the AAG's longstanding support of scientific freedom, AAG Executive Director Doug Richardson wrote to Barton on August 12, asserting: "your unprecedented approach ... is not the appropriate method of resolving a matter of scientific dispute." Richardson also joined a separate letter that has been signed on to by a wide range of scientific societies, disciplinary associations, and prominent members of the university community. ■

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