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Through the NSC Alliance partnership with the American Institute of Biological Sciences, we are pleased to provide NSC Alliance members with the following public policy update. With proper attribution to NSC Alliance, all material from these reports may be reproduced or forwarded. We encourage you to share this report with colleagues at your institution. Anyone interested in receiving copies of the NSC Alliance Washington Report may subscribe at <http://www.NSCAlliance.org>-- it's free!

If you have any questions or require additional information regarding any of the following items, please contact NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp at 202-628-1500 x 250 or at rgropp@aibs.org.

Action Alert: Write to Congress about Tax Reform

Congress is considering major tax code overhauls that would increase the tax burden for many graduate students. H.R. 1, the plan now moving through the House, would increase taxes for graduate students receiving tuition waivers. Under the rewrite of the tax code, tuition waivers would be taxed as income. The bill would also eliminate individual deductions for college tuition, interest, and other education expenses.

The House of Representatives will start debating the bill within days. The Senate is concurrently considering their own version of the legislation, which does not appear to include these objectionable changes to current tax law.

Please take a minute to write to your Representative and Senators to encourage them to consider how their actions could have long-term and negative impacts on U.S. science competitiveness by taxing students who wish to pursue careers in STEM fields. You can send a letter from <https://policy.aibs.org/action/>.

NSC Alliance 2017 Board and Officer Election Candidates

As part of the NSC Alliance process for selecting and electing members of the Board of Directors and Officers of the organization, NSC Alliance is announcing the proposed slate of candidates for open seats on the Board of Directors.

NSC Alliance will accept any additional nominations through 5:00 p.m. Eastern time on December 1, 2017. If you would like to nominate a candidate to the Board, please send their name, affiliation, and contact information to rgropp@aibs.org. In your nominations, please specify whether you are nominating the person to serve on the Board or as an Officer.

After this review period closes, all official representatives of NSC Alliance members in good standing will receive a ballot. The election will be held in early December.

2017 NSC Alliance Board Elections – Proposed Slate of Candidates Officers:

President: Dr. John Bates, Field Museum of Natural History
Vice President: Dr. Barbara Thiers, New York Botanical Garden
Secretary: Dr. Larry Page, University of Florida
Treasurer: Dr. Sarah George, Utah Museum of Natural History

Board Members:

Linda Lee “Cissy” Farm: Bishop Museum of Natural History
Gil Nelson: Florida State University
Rebecca Rundell: SUNY-ESF
Jennifer Zaspel: Milwaukee Public Museum

BCoN Requests Community Input

The natural history collections community is invited to provide input on a draft report about community progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the Strategic and Implementation Plans for NIBA. The report is the outcome of a two-day stakeholder workshop held in Washington, DC in January 2017 by the Biodiversity Collections Network (BCoN).

Since the community’s Strategic Plan for a Network Integrated Biocollections Alliance (NIBA) was first published, significant progress has been made toward the goals it articulated. However, as with any effort of significance, it is wise to periodically assess progress.

Although the participants in the workshop and the BCoN Advisory Committee have endeavored to capture an accurate assessment of progress toward NIBA, we have almost certainly missed some significant developments. Thus, we invite you to review this document and share your thoughts and suggestions with us. We also ask that you share this request with colleagues.

We invite comments on the draft document by Friday, November 24, 2017. All comments or questions should be submitted electronically to PublicPolicy@aibs.org.

[Read the draft workshop report.](#)

EPA Bars Agency-Funded Scientists from Advisory Boards

A new directive from Scott Pruitt, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), prohibits researchers who are receiving EPA research funding from serving on any of the agency's nearly two-dozen advisory committees.

Pruitt cited a figure of \$77 million in agency grants that went to advisory board members over three years. "There is a question that arises over independence," Pruitt said. "They have to choose: either the grant or service. But not both."

The directive took effect on 31 October 2017. All current advisory board members will have to decide whether to continue serving and return grant funding or to step down from their position if they receive EPA funds.

Already, two members have relinquished their grants. Seven others did not end their funding and are not longer eligible to serve. Another researcher is challenging Administrator Pruitt to fire her.

"I just wanted to let you know that I am not officially resigning or stepping down from the board," wrote Science Advisory Board (SAB) member Robyn Wilson to the EPA. "It seems as if the intention of the Administrator is to force us to choose between our grants and the board given the new policy. I simply will not do that as it is a false choice... Mr. Pruitt is welcome to officially fire me from the Board, as I am clearly not on the new list of SAB members. But given I had one year left in my term, and I was hired by the previous Administrator, it seems as if the appropriate way for him to enact this policy is to provide an official letter informing me that I am being let go before my term ends."

Pruitt has already appointed people with close ties to industry to chair the Science Advisory Board, the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee, and the Board of Scientific Counselors.

Ten Democratic Senators have requested the Government Accountability Office review the policy, which would "strengthen the voice of industry-funded scientists," according to a letter sent by the group.

Terry Yosie, a former director of the SAB who served during the Reagan administration, said that the directive represents "a major purge of independent scientists and a decision to sideline the SAB from major EPA decision-making in the future."

House Science Committee Chairman to Retire

Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX) has announced that he will retire at the end of the current session of Congress in early 2019. Smith has served as chair of the House Science, Space, and

Technology Committee since 2012, but is term-limited under Republican caucus rules from retaining the chairmanship for another term.

“I love my job; there’s nothing else I’d rather be doing. But chairmanship ending, second grandchild arriving,” Smith told reporters.

Smith has used his position as chairman to investigate National Science Foundation grants that he saw as frivolous and to push the Department of Energy towards funding more basic research rather than applied research.

Smith’s retirement will set off an internal competition among Republicans who wish to succeed him as chair. Representative Frank Lucas (R-OK) is the current vice chair and is next in line in terms of seniority. Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) ran for the position in 2012 but was defeated by Smith.

Nominations Sought for Federal STEM Education Committee

A new Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education Advisory Panel is being formed. The committee will advise the National Science and Technology Council Committee on STEM Education and assist with updating the federal government’s five-year strategic plan on STEM education.

The formation of the body was directed in legislation passed by Congress in 2016.

Nominations are sought of individuals from academic institutions, non-profits, and industry, including in-school, out-of-school, and informal education practitioners. Recommendations should consist of the name of the submitting individual, the organization or the affiliation providing the member nomination, the name of the recommended individual, the recommended individual’s curriculum vita, an expression of the individual’s interest in serving, and the following recommended individual’s contact information: employment address, telephone number, FAX number, and email address. Self-recommendations are accepted. If you would like to make a membership recommendation, please send your recommendation to Nafeesa Owens at stemedadvisory@nsf.gov.

Learn more at <https://nsf.gov/ehr/STEMEdAdvisory.jsp>.

Bill Targets ‘Silly’ Science

Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) has introduced legislation to reform the review process for federal research grants. S. 1973, the BASIC Research Act would overhaul the grant award process to end supposedly wasteful government spending.

Notably, the bill would also require all grant applications to be available to the public and would prohibit subgrants unless the recipient is disclosed on a publicly accessible website.

The bill would require grant review panels to include a taxpayer advocate as well as an expert “in a field unrelated to the field of research under which the grant proposal was submitted” who is “not professionally affiliated with any academic or research institution.”

A new watchdog office would be created to replace the Office of the Inspector General of the National Science Foundation. The new office would “review Federal grant projects to determine if the research will deliver value to the taxpayers by randomly selecting Federal grants for review after awards are made but prior to distribution of funds.”

The legislation would also codify current federal requirements regarding open access. All results of federally supported research would have to be available to the public within 12 months of publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Senator Paul’s bill was considered during a recent hearing by the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management.

“From my point of view, we do have a problem. We do have silly research going on,” said Senator Paul.

Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI) pushed back on that notion. “While certain basic research projects that have received federal funding have some very silly-sounding titles, further examination may reveal the true scientific merit and potential broader impacts of that work.”

S. 1973 currently has no co-sponsors and its prospects are unclear.

Dimensions of Biodiversity Solicitation

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has released the new proposal solicitation for the Dimensions of Biodiversity program. One of the major changes announced is a co-funding opportunity between NSF and the National Research Foundation of South Africa for U.S.-South African collaborations. Additionally, the program will no longer consider proposals that investigate marine biodiversity or marine environments.

Learn more at <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2018/nsf18512/nsf18512.htm>.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit association that serves as an advocate for natural science collections, the institutions that preserve them, and the research and education that extend from them for the benefit of science, society, and stewardship of the environment. NSC Alliance members are part of an international community of museums, botanical gardens, herbariums, universities, and other institutions that house natural science collections and utilize them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities. Website: www.NSCAlliance.org.

The NSC Alliance Washington Report is a publication of the NSC Alliance. For information about membership in the NSC Alliance, please contact spotter@aibs.org.