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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.

ICE Guidance on Foreign Students Rescinded

On July 6, 2020, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued a new guidance that would have forced international students to leave the U.S. if they did not participate in in-person instruction during the fall 2020 semester.

The ICE guidance modified temporary exemptions issued in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those provisions allowed nonimmigrant students to take more online courses than normally permitted by federal regulation. Under the new policy, foreign students enrolled in schools and/or programs that are fully online for the fall 2020 semester would have been forced to "depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status."

The directive received immediate opposition from the scientific and higher education communities.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance endorsed a statement calling for the policy to be rescinded immediately. The statement argued, in part: "While all sectors of the United States economy, including higher education institutions, are working to identify responsible strategies for invigorating the economy during an on-going global health crisis, this policy punishes students and educational institutions for behaving responsibly. As we sadly continue to see in communities across the country, premature and poorly planned re-openings are contributing to rapid increases in COVID-19, and ultimately infusing additional risk and uncertainty into the economy. To effectively mandate that universities across the nation, regardless of local needs and institutional capacity, provide and then require students to participate in in-person instruction this fall is irresponsible and dangerous."

On July 8, Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology filed lawsuits against the new guidance on the grounds that the Administration had failed to follow appropriate federal procedures under the Administrative Procedure Act in crafting the policy. More than 200 other universities, including Columbia, Stanford, Duke, and Yale signed court briefs supporting the lawsuit. Another group of 20 universities in the Western United States filed a lawsuit on July 13 against the order. The directive was also facing a lawsuit from 19 state Attorneys General.

On July 14, the Administration announced that the controversial policy facing multiple lawsuits would be dropped. The temporary exemptions issued at the beginning of the pandemic allowing international students taking online courses to reside in the United States remain in effect.

Legislation Introduced to Provide COVID-19 Relief to Research Community

Lawmakers in both chambers of Congress have introduced bipartisan legislation to provide emergency relief appropriations for federal science agencies to support the research community during the ongoing public health crisis.

On June 24, 2020, the Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act (H.R. 7308) was introduced by Representatives Diana DeGette (D-CO), Fred Upton (R-MI), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Frank Lucas (R-OK), Anna Eshoo (D-CA), and Anthony Gonzalez (R-OH) in the U.S. House of Representatives. And on July 23, 2020, a companion measure to the RISE Act was introduced in the Senate by Senators Edward Markey (D-MA), Thom Tillis (R-NC), Gary Peters (D-MI), and Cory Gardner (R-CO).

The bill would authorize approximately $26 billion in supplemental funding for federal research agencies to be awarded to research universities, independent institutions, and national laboratories to address the COVID-19 related disruption to federally funded research. The relief funding would be allocated to federal departments and agencies as follows:

- $10 billion for the National Institutes of Health
- $3 billion for the National Science Foundation
- $2 billion for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- $5 billion for the Department of Energy, of which $3 billion would be available for the Office of Science
- $300 million for the U.S. Geological Survey within Department of the Interior

- $3 billion for the Department of Defense
- $650 million for the Department of Commerce, of which $350 million would be directed to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and $300 million to the National Institute of Standards and Technology.
- $380 million for the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- $200 million for the Department of Education
- $200 million for the Environmental Protection Agency

The measure would also provide temporary regulatory flexibility until universities and nonprofit research institutes can safely reopen federally-funded research laboratories, allowing graduate students, postdocs, principal investigators, technical support staff, and other research personnel to continue to receive salaries while research activities have been disrupted. According to Representative DeGette, these funds could enable researchers "to complete work that was disrupted by COVID-19, or extend the training or employment of researchers on an existing research project for up to two years because of the disruption of the job market."

"These researchers are essential to our nation's public health, national security, economic growth and international competitiveness," stated the lawmakers. "Preserving our scientific infrastructure and protecting our innovation pipeline will help ensure U.S. leadership in the world and help us better respond to future pandemics."

Provisions included in the RISE Act are consistent with recommendations made earlier this year by higher education and scientific societies and coalitions, including the Association of American Universities, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and the American Council on Education. These provisions were also endorsed by 181 Representatives and 33 Senators.

NSC Alliance is among more than 300 higher education, research, industry groups, and associations that have endorsed H.R. 7308 so far.

House Considers FY 2021 Appropriations

Over the summer, the House Appropriations Committee rapidly advanced its work on all twelve fiscal year (FY) 2021 appropriations bills. These bills will now be considered by the full House of Representatives.

The Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) spending measure would provide $8.55 billion to the National Science Foundation (NSF), which is $270 million increase from FY 2020. The President proposed a 6 percent cut for the science agency for FY 2021. Research and related activities within NSF, which includes the Biological Sciences Directorate, would receive grow by $230 million to $6.97 billion in FY 2021. Under the House bill, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) would receive flat funding at $22.63 billion; the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) would receive $1.04 billion, an increase of 1 percent over FY 2020; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) would see an increase of $102 million to $5.45 billion in FY 2021.

The Labor, Health and Human Services (Labor-HHS) spending plan includes $196.5 billion in discretionary funding, $2.4 billion above the FY 2020 enacted level and $20.8 billion above the President's request. The measure provides $24.4 billion in emergency funding to support State and local public health departments, public health laboratories, and global health activities during the pandemic. The National Institutes of Health would receive $47 billion (an increase of $5.5 billion) overall, with $42 billion (increase of $500 million) in annual appropriations and $5 billion in emergency appropriations to improve capacity at research institutions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would receive $8 billion (+$232 million) in FY 2021, in addition to $9 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations to improve preparedness for public health emergencies.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services would receive $257 million, an increase of $5 million above FY 2020, with its Office of Museum Services receiving an 8 percent increase to $41.5 million.

The Interior-Environment bill includes $36.8 billion in discretionary funding, an increase of $771 million above the FY 2020 enacted level, and $5.11 billion over the President's FY 2021 request. The measure includes $15 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations for investments in critical infrastructure. The Department of the Interior overall would receive $13.83 billion, $304 million above the FY 2020 enacted level. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would receive $1.6 billion, an increase of $37 million above FY 2020. The National Park Service would receive $3.22 billion, $55 million above FY 2020. The Bureau of Land Management would shrink by $28 million to $1.3 billion.

Funding for the U.S. Geological Survey would grow by 2 percent to $1.29 billion in FY 2021, with its Ecosystems Mission Area receiving $261.3 million. The bill modifies and expands upon the budget restructure proposed by the Trump Administration to include the Environmental Health and Land Change Science programs under the Ecosystems account. The President had proposed eliminating the Environmental Health account, but House appropriators have allocated a flat budget of $23.5 million for the program.

The Smithsonian Institution would be funded at $1.06 billion, 1 percent above FY 2020. Budget for the National Museum of Natural History would expand by nearly 5 percent to $52.1 million.

The Agriculture-FDA bill provides $3.3 billion, $90 million above FY 2020, for agricultural research programs, including the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The bill targets funding to research to mitigate and stop devastating crop diseases, improve food safety and water quality, increase production, and combat antimicrobial resistance. Funding for ARS would be slashed by 10 percent to $1.45 billion, while NIFA, which partners with academic institutions to conduct research, education, and extension activities, would receive $1.57 billion, an increase of 3 percent above FY 2020. The bill boosts funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative by $10 million to $435 million.

The House of Representatives will now consider a four-bill appropriations package or "minibus," which includes spending bills for State-Foreign Operations, Agriculture-Rural Development-FDA, Interior-Environment, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. And next week, the chamber will take up a seven-bill package, which includes the CJS, Labor-HHS, Defense, Energy and Water Development, Financial Service and General Government, Homeland Security, and Transportation-Housing and Urban Development spending bills. Lawmakers in the House are planning to swiftly advance and pass all FY 2021 appropriations bills by the end of July, while markups of spending legislation have been delayed in the Senate Appropriations Committee over partisan disagreements on police reform and COVID-19 spending. Both chambers of Congress will need to pass all 12 appropriations bills or pass a stopgap measure before the end of the fiscal year on September 30 to avoid a government shutdown.

Articles Call for Leveraging Biodiversity Science Infrastructure

Two articles published in the July 2020 issue of *BioScience* -- an Editorial led by NSC Alliance Treasurer Jennifer Zaspel and a Viewpoint led by Past-President Joe Cook -- are calling for increased coordination and new strategies for integrating biodiversity collections into efforts to tackle pathogen discovery and emerging infectious diseases, including zoonoses.

In the Editorial, "Human Health, Interagency Coordination, and the Need for Biodiversity Data," Zaspel and colleagues note that "massive advances in infrastructure, digitization, and organization of physical specimens and their associated data have transformed their use to address global societal challenges." To build on these successes, the authors call for greater interagency cooperation and support for the "infrastructure, coordination, and management of biodiversity data."

In the Viewpoint, "Integrating Biodiversity Infrastructure into Pathogen Discovery and Mitigation of Emerging Infectious Diseases," Cook and colleagues, including current NSC Alliance President John Bates, elaborate the ways in which biodiversity science is a powerful tool for identifying future threats to human well-being: "At its core, the COVID-19 pandemic is a consequence of our fundamental ignorance of our planet's natural ecosystems and the effects of our encroachment on them." The authors argue that if properly supported the world's natural history collections, which house 3 billion-plus specimens, can be a powerful tool for combating this ignorance.

NSC Alliance Endorses Call for Protecting COVID-19 Patient Data

On July 10, 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued a notice ordering hospitals to bypass the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and send all COVID-19 patient data to a centralized database effective July 15, 2020. The directive raised concerns about transparency and public access to data for researchers as well as public health officials across the country.

According to the order, HHS, and not CDC, will collect daily reports about COVID-19 patients being treated at each hospital, the number of beds and ventilators available, and other information related to tracking and monitoring the pandemic. The directive states that if hospitals were reporting this information to their states, they "may be relieved from reporting directly to the Federal Government if they receive a written release from the State stating that the State will collect the data from the hospitals and take over Federal reporting responsibilities."

It is not clear if the new centralized HHS database -- managed by TeleTracking, a Pittsburgh-based health data firm -- will be open to the public, according to the *New York Times*. This could impact the work of researchers, modelers, and health officials who currently rely on CDC data to make projections and important decisions regarding the ongoing health crisis. Questions have also been raised about whether the contract to TeleTracking was properly awarded. "Given the importance of collecting this data as quickly as possible, I have several questions about the Trump Administration's decision to award a multimillion dollar contract on a non-competitive basis to create a seemingly duplicative data collection system," stated Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Ranking Member on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

According to officials, the change will streamline data gathering and assist the White House coronavirus task force in allocating resources such as personal protective equipment. HHS spokesperson Michael Caputo called the CDC's system inadequate. He said that the two systems would be linked and CDC would continue to make data public.

The move has been criticized by former government health officials. "Centralizing control of all data under the umbrella of an inherently political apparatus is dangerous and breeds distrust," said Dr. Nicole Lurie, former Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at HHS. "It appears to cut off the ability of agencies like CDC to do its basic job." Representative Donna Shalala (D-FL), who served as the Secretary of HHS under President Bill Clinton said: "Only the C.D.C. has the expertise to collect data… I think any move to take responsibility away from the people who have the expertise is politicizing."

NSC Alliance has endorsed a community letter led by the Infectious Diseases Society of America, HIV Medicine Association, American Society for Microbiology, and American Public Health Association, urging the Administration to reverse its decision to bypass the CDC in the collection of COVID-19 patient data in order to maintain the integrity of the data and keep public health data public. The letter calls for investing in data reporting at the CDC and highlights the importance of the data to inform state and jurisdictional responses.

New Director Takes Helm at NSF

On June 18, 2020, the U.S. Senate confirmed Dr. Sethuraman "Panch" Panchanathan as the 15th Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The White House nominated Dr. Panchanathan, a computer scientist and Chief Research and Innovation officer at Arizona State University, to lead NSF in December 2019. Dr. Panchanathan has served as a member of the National Science Board, NSF's governing body,

since 2014. He is a Fellow of the National Academy of Inventors (NAI), and a Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Engineering. He is also the Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), and the Society of Optical Engineering (SPIE).

"Right now, the world faces significant scientific challenges -- most obviously a pandemic." Said Dr. Panchanathan. "But in addition to providing creative solutions to address current problems, our eyes are on the future, leveraging partnerships at every level and encouraging diversity that breeds new ideas for a robust pipeline of young scientists. It is only through that expansive perspective on the scientific and engineering enterprise that we can recognize the brightest ideas and nurture them into tomorrow's world-class technological innovations."

According to NSF, Panch has identified three pillars of his vision for the agency: advancing research into the future, ensuring inclusivity, and continuing global leadership in science and engineering.

Dr. Panchanathan replaces President Trump's science adviser, Dr. Kelvin Droegemeier, who has been serving as Acting NSF Director since previous NSF Director France Cordova's term ended earlier in 2020.

Faculty Concerned About Returning to In-Person Teaching

Faculty across the country are expressing concerns about the health implications of returning to in-person instruction this fall semester, according to a report by *Inside Higher Ed.*

A June 2020 survey of Purdue University faculty and staff members and graduate students, which received more than 7,000 responses, found that 53 percent of respondents felt unsafe about returning to campus for in-person classes in fall. Sixty-two percent of respondents felt at least somewhat unsafe teaching or interacting with students. Ninety-two percent said they were not confident students would "socially distance appropriately outside the classroom." Just under 60 percent of respondents said they lacked confidence that students would wear masks "most of the time," despite a rule requiring face coverings.

About three-quarters of faculty members at Pennsylvania's state-owned universities surveyed by the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties do not believe they can safely teach face-to-face in the fall semester. About 40 percent of faculty respondents reported having a medical condition that puts them at increased risk of severe illness as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 60 percent are very concerned about contracting COVID-19 or potentially exposing their family. Only 12 percent want to return to teach in person in fall.

Faculty members at numerous other institutions have completed similar surveys, launched petitions, published op-eds, and expressed concerns to their administrations and governing boards about returning to campus in the fall. Many have suggested that instructors should not be forced to teach in-person, and that teaching remotely shouldn't require any special medical exemption.

Webinar Series: Resources for Natural History Collections in a New Virtual World

Recognizing the rapid changes happening within museum communities and the efforts being made throughout the community to adapt to these changes, iDigBio is organizing a new webinar series, entitled, *Adapting to COVID-19: Resources for Natural History Collections in a New Virtual World*. The webinar series aims to help provide insight into how different groups and institutions are adapting to life in a quickly evolving world. The NSC Alliance, the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC), and the American Institute of Biological Sciences contributed to the planning of these programs.

The first two webinars address lessons learned from planning the Digital Data and SPNHC conferences:

July 28: Planning for Virtual Events: Lessons learned from Digital Data & SPNHC Conference Planners
Topics to include: Registration, Planning the Schedule, Recruiting and Training for Presenters and Moderators, Planning for Posters and Oral Presenters (Storage, Communication, Accessibility - time zones, etc), Vendors, Website and Organization, Benefits of a Virtual Mtg

August 25: Executing Virtual Events: Lessons learned from Digital Data & SPNHC Conference Planners
Topics to include: Zoom, Social Media, Audience Engagement/Managing Expectations, Surveys, Day of Roles and Responsibilities, Future Considerations

Webinars will be held from 2:00 - 3:30 ET. All webinars will be recorded and held in Zoom.

Follow this Zoom link to join the webinars:
https://ufl.zoom.us/j/99571640979?pwd=V0VwbDBySEtBYUptNUZ2L0RQNGh0UT09

Visit the webinar series page for information on the additional webinars that will be featured in this series: https://www.idigbio.org/content/webinar-series-adapting-covid-resources-natural-history-collections-new-virtual-world

New Members Appointed to NSB

On July 20, 2020, President Donald Trump appointed new members to the National Science Board (NSB) -- the governing body of the National Science Foundation (NSF). NSB advises Congress and the Administration on issues in science and engineering.

The four new appointees to the 24-member Board will serve six-year terms:

- Sudarsanam Suresh Babu: Governor's Chair of Advanced Manufacturing at the University of Tennessee/Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

- Aaron Dominguez: Provost and Professor of Physics at the Catholic University of America
- Darío Gil: Director of IBM Research
- Melvyn Huff: Lecturer at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth
- are new appointees to the 24-member National Science Board and will serve a six-year term.

Roger Beachy, Professor Emeritus of Biology at Washington University in St. Louis, has been reappointed to serve a second six-year term on the NSB. Earlier this year, University of Texas at El Paso President Heather Wilson was appointed to serve on the Board as part of the class of 2026. The remaining two NSB members are expected to be appointed in the coming months.

White House Nominates BLM Director

President Donald Trump has announced his intent to nominate William P. Pendley to serve as the next Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Mr. Pendley is currently serving as Deputy Director for Policy and Programs at BLM. He previously served as President of Mountain States Legal Foundation, as a Captain in the United States Marine Corps, and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Energy and Minerals in the Reagan administration. Mr. Pendley earned his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the George Washington University and his J.D. from the University of Wyoming.

BCoN Survey: Layoffs, Furloughs, and Plans for Re-Opening Natural History Collections

The Biodiversity Collections Network (BCoN) is working to help the scientific and natural history collections/museum community understand how COVID-19 related economic disruptions are affecting research, education, specimen and data management and care, institutional administration, and other factors. Results of a community survey of collections professionals were shared recently. BCoN continues to track impacts to natural history collection institutions and the people who care for and use these scientific resources.

Individuals are invited to share information about their institutions operating status – plans to re-open, operational status and limitations, closures, staff furloughs and Reductions in Force, program closures or terminations, and other disruptions to institutional operations in the forms available here: https://bcon.aibs.org/2020/06/02/collections-and-covid-19-operating-status/

BCoN invites information from all types of natural history collection holding institutions, which includes natural history museums, natural science collections, arboreta and herbaria, or other facilities with natural science collections. The name of the individual sharing this information is not requested and will not be published.

Summaries of survey responses compiled so far are publicly available on the BCoN website.

Nominations Sought for NSB Awards

The National Science Board (NSB) is accepting nominations for its 2021 honorary public service awards. The Vannevar Bush Award recognizes lifelong leaders in science and technology who have made substantial contributions to the welfare of the nation through public service in science, technology, and public policy. The Public Service Award honors individuals and groups for substantial contributions to increasing public understanding of science and engineering. Nominations are due by September 30, 2020.

Learn more about the awards and submit a nomination at http://www.nsf.gov/nsb/awards/.

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 dbosnjak@aibs.org.