

NSC Alliance Washington Report

NSC Alliance Washington Report, Volume 1, Issue 15, December 8, 2010

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Policy News from NSC Alliance

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. 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

Budget Cutting Plan Could Influence Science, Education Program Funding

On 18 February 2010, President Barack Obama signed a Presidential Executive Order establishing the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. The Commission was charged with “identifying policies to improve the fiscal situation in the medium term and to achieve fiscal sustainability over the long run.” According to the establishing order, the Commission was specifically charged with proposing “recommendations designed to balance the budget, excluding interest payments on the debt, by 2015...[and] that meaningfully improve the long-run fiscal outlook, including changes to address the growth of entitlement spending and the gap between the projected revenues and expenditures of the Federal Government.”

The 18-member Commission, which was co-chaired by former United States Senator Alan Simpson (R-WY) and Erskine Bowles, a Chief of Staff to President Clinton, released its final report, “Moment of Truth,” on 1 December 2010. The bipartisan Commission, which was selected by the President and the majority and minority leaders of the House and Senate, included the following members: Senator Max Baucus (D-MT); Representative Xavier Becerra (D-CA); Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI); Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK); Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND); David Cote, Chairman and CEO, Honeywell International; Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID); Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL); Ann Fudge, Former CEO, Young & Rubicam Brands; Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH); Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-TX); Alice Rivlin, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institute

and former Director, Office of Management and Budget; Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI); Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL); Rep. John Spratt (D-SC); and Andrew Stern, President, Service Employees International Union.

The 66-page plan, which was endorsed by 11 of 18 Commission members, was developed in the context of the following guiding principles and values:

1. We all have a patriotic duty to make America better off tomorrow than it is today;
2. Don't disrupt the fragile economic recovery;
3. Cut and invest to promote economic growth and keep America competitive;
4. Protect the truly disadvantaged;
5. Cut spending we cannot afford;
6. Demand productivity and effectiveness from Washington;
7. Reform and simplify the tax code;
8. Don't make promises we can't keep;
9. The problem is real, and the solution will be painful; and
10. Keep America sound over the long run.

Within this context, the report's plan for discretionary spending starts bluntly: "Over the past decade, base discretionary spending (excluding war costs) has grown by 34 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars (64 percent in nominal dollars), and the President's Fiscal Year 2011 budget projects it to grow by an additional 6 percent to \$1.26 trillion in 2015. In order to bring down the deficit, Washington will have to rein in discretionary spending. Every aspect of the discretionary budget must be scrutinized, no agency can be off limits, and no program that spends too much or achieves too little can be spared. The federal government can and must adapt to the 21st century by transforming itself into a leaner and more efficient operation."

As supporting evidence for the Commission's recommendation to "cut-and-reinvest," the Commission called attention to the fact that the "government funds more than 44 job training programs across nine different federal agencies, at least 20 programs at 12 agencies dedicated to the study of invasive species, and 105 programs meant to encourage participation in science, technology, education, and math. Many of these programs cannot demonstrate to Congress or taxpayers they are actually accomplishing their intended purpose."

Other areas for action are not new or surprising and include tax reform, health care, Social Security, other mandatory spending program reform, and process-related efficiencies.

The report is far from being law, but it could influence the President's budget request or how the President's budget is received by Congress.

The complete report is available at http://www.fiscalcommission.gov/sites/fiscalcommission.gov/files/documents/TheMomentofTruth12_1_2010.pdf.

New Shipping Regulations to Ease Regulatory Burden for Collections

Starting 1 January 2011, natural history specimens shipped via commercial air will no longer be classified as “dangerous goods.” The new policy, issued by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), also removes a requirement for shippers to be formally trained in how to package scientific specimens; instead shippers can train themselves.

These special provisions, known as “A180” in the 52nd edition of the IATA Dangerous Good Manual, should enable researchers and collections curators to ship specimens more easily, as well as expand the list of countries which these materials can be sent to or from.

Andrew Bentley, Ichthyology Collection Manager at the University of Kansas’ Natural History Museum & Biodiversity Research Center, was an integral player in representing the collections community to IATA. According to Bentley, the major air shipping companies (DHL, FedEx, and UPS) have indicated that they will accept packages that meet the A180 guidelines. FedEx previously barred the shipment of dead animals. The U.S. Postal Service will also exempt the shipment of natural history specimens from its list of dangerous goods shipped domestically.

In order to qualify for the exemption, specimens must be placed in three layers of heat-sealed bags and contain no more than 30 mL of free liquid. Additionally, scientific specimens will still not be allowed in carry-on or checked luggage.

The new regulations are available at <http://nscalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/iata-dangerous-goods-52nd-edition-a180.pdf>

Senate Committee Passes Legislation to Reauthorize IMLS

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions passed a bill on 3 December 2010 to reauthorize the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The legislation, S. 3984, would increase funding authorizations for the agency’s museum services to \$38.6 million in fiscal year 2011. This represents an increase of 14 percent above the fiscal year 2010 funding level.

The measure must also be approved by the House and signed by the President before the 111th Congress adjourns or the reauthorization process starts over in the new Congress.

SPNHC Seeks Guidance on Best Practices and Ethics Policies

The Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) is working to produce practical guidelines to help develop best practices and ethics policies for natural history collections. With this goal, SPNHC is reaching out to museums, universities, and discipline-specific societies to request copies of their best practices and ethics documents. It is from this broad perspective that a toolkit will be crafted with the goal to be useful to the natural history community with regards to Best Practices and Ethics. If any institution or sister society has such

a document, the SPNHC Ethics Committee would appreciate receiving a copy (electronic preferred), which can be sent to the chairperson, Linda S. Ford at lford@oeb.harvard.edu.

NSC Alliance Helps Preserve Peruvian Natural History Museum

Scientists and scientific organizations recently expressed concern for the preservation and appropriate curation of specimens held in the Museo de Historia Natural of San Marcos University in Lima, Peru. On 19 November 2010, university officials were scheduled to consider plans to develop new space for the university's graduate school and new facilities for the museum. The problem, according to some scientists who were familiar with the process, was that the plans did not address the need for appropriate temporary space for the preservation and curation of the museum's specimens. Several scientific organizations, including NSC Alliance, wrote to the President of the University of San Marcos to encourage the university to work closely with museum curators to ensure that no specimens would be lost or damaged. The effort was successful. On 19 November the President of the University of San Marcos announced that the needs of the museum would be considered in future planning and development efforts.

The NSC Alliance and other letters may be read at <http://nscalliance.org/?p=339>.

Biosecurity Advisory Board to Seek Input from Research Community

On 5 January 2011, the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity (NSABB), an advisory committee to the Federal Government, is hosting a public consultation to obtain input from the scientific community regarding strategies for enhancing personnel reliability and strengthening the culture of responsibility at research facilities that conduct research with dangerous pathogens. The discussion will inform NSABB deliberations and ultimately the development of an NSABB report on the topic. The meeting will be held on January 5, 2011 from 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. at the Bethesda Hyatt Regency, 7400 Wisconsin Avenue (One Bethesda Metro Center), Bethesda, MD. The meeting is open to the public, but pre-registration is required. Please visit <http://www.biosecurityboard.gov> to register.

Collections May Hold 35,000 Unidentified Plant Species

A major untapped pool of undiscovered flowering plant species may be natural history collections, according to a paper recently published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Based on a survey of 3,200 plant species, the study's authors found that only 16% of species were described within five years of collection; nearly one quarter of species were described more than 50 years after they were collected. The authors estimate that more than 35,000 plant species are likely to be 'discovered' in herbaria collections within the next few decades.

Some members of the study attribute the potential for discovery of new species within collections to a lack of trained taxonomists and resources. Dr. Mark Carine of London's Natural

History Museum told BBC News: “Lack of manpower and lack of expertise is obviously a major issue here. There’s no doubt we just don’t have enough people to complete the process as rapidly as we might like.”

To read the study, visit <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2010/12/01/1011841108>. To read the BBC’s coverage, visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11913076>.

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.

Note: You are receiving a copy of this electronic report as part of your membership in the NSC Alliance. Contact the Alliance office with any email address or member representative name changes send an email to spotter@aibs.org.