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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.

Congress, White House May Have Reached Budget Cap Agreement

White House and congressional leaders have announced a bipartisan budget deal that would raise overall spending caps by \$320 billion over fiscal years (FY) 2020 and 2021. The deal would suspend budget sequestration which would have slashed discretionary spending by \$125 billion in FY 2020.

According to Bloomberg news, defense spending would increase from \$716 billion in FY 2019 to \$738 billion in FY 2020 and \$741 billion in FY 2021. Non-defense discretionary spending, which is the largest source of science funding, would increase from \$605 billion in FY 2019 to \$632 billion in FY 2020 and \$635 billion in FY 2021.

Under the agreement, the nation's debt ceiling would be suspended until July 2021, allowing the government to keep borrowing for two more years and delaying further talks on the subject until after the 2020 elections.

Both chambers are expected to vote on the agreement before leaving for the August recess. Once the budget deal is enacted by Congress, all 12 appropriations bills will need to be passed by

both chambers and signed by the President before the fiscal year ends on September 30 to avert a government shutdown. There are currently two FY 2020 spending bills remaining before the House — the Homeland Security and Legislative Branch appropriations bills, while the Senate has yet to act on any FY 2020 appropriations bills. If the appropriations bills are not completed before the current fiscal year ends, Congress may consider a stopgap spending measure in the form of a continuing resolution to temporarily fund the government.

House Approves Funding Boosts for Science

The U.S. House of Representatives passed its second fiscal year (FY) 2020 spending package on June 25, 2019. The “minibus” includes the Interior-Environment, Commerce-Justice-Science, Agriculture-Rural Development-Food and Drug Administration, Military Construction-Veterans Affairs, and Transportation-Housing and Urban Development appropriations bills.

The five-bill package would provide funding increases to most federal science agencies and programs, rejecting the President’s proposed budget cuts. The House measure would fund:

- The National Science Foundation (NSF) at \$8.6 billion, an increase of 7 percent above FY 2019. NSF was slated for a 12 percent cut under the President’s request.
- Research and Related Activities within NSF, which includes the Biological Sciences Directorate, would receive \$7.1 billion (+9 percent).
- The National Institutes of Standards and Technology would receive \$1.04 billion (+6 percent).
- The U.S. Geological Survey would increase to \$1.24 billion (+7 percent), with \$168 million (+7 percent) for the Ecosystems Mission Area. The President had proposed shrinking the overall budget for the agency by 15 percent.
- The National Parks Service would grow by 4 percent, to \$3.4 billion.
- The Bureau of Land Management would receive \$1.4 billion (+5 percent).
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is slated for \$1.66 billion (+5 percent).
- The Environmental Protection Agency would receive an 8 percent boost, bringing it to \$9.5 billion. Within this budget, \$728 million (+1 percent) would support Science and Technology. The President had proposed slashing EPA’s budget by 31 percent.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is set to receive \$1.4 billion (-17 percent) under the House’s plan. ARS was slated for a 26 percent budget cut under the President’s proposal.
- The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, a USDA research agency, would grow to \$1.6 billion (+8 percent), with \$445 million (+7 percent) for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.
- The Smithsonian Institution would receive \$1.07 billion (+3 percent).

President Trump has previously announced that he will veto this spending package.

On June 19, 2019, the House passed another four-bill package, including Defense, Energy and Water, Labor-Health and Human Services-Education, and State-Foreign Operations appropriations bills. Under this measure, the National Institutes of Health, would receive \$41.1

billion in FY 2020, an increase of \$2 billion over the FY 2019 enacted level. The Department of Energy's Office of Science would receive \$ 6.87 billion, an increase of \$285 million or 4.3 percent above the FY 2019 level and \$1.3 billion above the President's request for FY 2020. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) would receive a \$15 million boost to \$257 million. The President had proposed terminating IMLS in FY 2020.

Alaska, Puerto Rico Plan Devastating Cuts to Universities

In July, Alaska Governor Michael Dunleavy slashed approximately 41 percent or \$130 million from the University of Alaska system budget, a move that will have long-lasting and significant impacts on research and education throughout the state and potentially the United States.

Governor Dunleavy used his line item veto authority to gut the budget of the University of Alaska system, which will likely result in the termination of research and education programs. "A preliminary rough estimate is that we would need to reduce 1,300 faculty and staff across the university system," said Jim Johnson, President of the University of Alaska system. The system includes multiple campuses throughout the state and include the University of Alaska at Fairbanks and University of Alaska at Anchorage.

Money saved from the University system's budget cuts will ensure that taxes are not raised and that funds are available for the Alaska Permanent Fund -- annual payments to state residents from oil revenue. Interestingly, the state's budget shortfall is in part a result of the collapse of the state's oil economy. During the 2018 election, Dunleavy campaigned on paying out a higher Permanent Fund Dividend. Several Republican lawmakers were supportive of the governor's move. The Alaska Legislature failed to override the Dunleavy's veto.

The University of Alaska system is now scrambling to adjust to the new fiscal reality. Administrators will need to decide how and where to allocate the cuts. According to *Science Insider*, the University Board of Regents may even consider extreme measures such as laying off tenured faculty and eliminating or downsizing campuses and departments.

The University of Alaska is not the only public university system dealing with drastic budget reductions. According to a report by *Inside Higher Ed*, the University of Puerto Rico's appropriation has fallen by \$333 million over three years. The University's budget has been reduced by \$86 million to \$501 million in fiscal year (FY) 2020. The budget had been slashed by \$44 million last year and by \$203 million the year before that. Based on a budget proposal for the university certified by Puerto Rico's Financial Oversight and Management Board, the appropriation is expected to drop further in future years. By FY 2022, the budget will fall under \$400 million, 56 percent below the university's historical baseline figure of \$879 million.

"It's becoming harder and harder to maintain the level of excellence that we need at the university," said Angel Rodriguez, President of the Puerto Rican Association of University Professors. Rodriguez estimated that over the past decade, the university has lost about 40 percent of its professors from attrition and enrollment has decreased by about 9,000 students.

White House Directs Agencies to Cut Federal Advisory Committees

President Trump signed an Executive Order on June 14, 2019, directing federal agencies to terminate a large number of current federal advisory committees that advise agencies on everything ranging from research priorities to public health, environmental, security, and economic policy.

The *Executive Order on Evaluating and Improving the Utility of Federal Advisory Committees* [instructs](#) agencies and departments to “evaluate the need” for each of their current advisory committees, whether established by a congressional statute, by the President, or by the head of the agency under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Based on this evaluation, the Order requires agencies to terminate by September 30, 2019 “at least one-third” of their federal advisory panels established not by law but by agency heads, including panels for which the objectives have been accomplished, the assigned work has become obsolete, and the primary functions have been absorbed by another body. The Order also targets committees where “the cost of operation is excessive in relation to the benefits to the Federal Government.”

Merit review panels that provide scientific expertise for policy decisions related to product safety are exempt from the provisions of the Order, as well as advisory committees of independent regulatory agencies.

On July 5, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) released [guidance](#) with instructions on implementing the Order. The guidance explains how to calculate the number of committees the agency must eliminate; by dividing the total number of FACA committees established by agency heads by three, then round down to the closest whole number, and finally subtracting any committees already eliminated since January 2017.

Agencies can, however, obtain a waiver from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for committees deemed “necessary for the delivery of essential services” or “warranted by the public interest.” Agencies with fewer than three advisory panels are exempt from the target of eliminating one-third of these panels.

The Administration is also seeking recommendations from agencies on terminating advisory panels established by the President or required by law. Agencies have until August 1, 2019 to submit their recommendations for such panels on whether they should be continued or terminated along with a detailed legislative plan for terminating statutory committees that the OMB Director could include in the President’s FY 2021 budget request to Congress.

Additionally, the Order caps the government-wide combined total number of federal advisory committees, not including the panels of independent regulatory agencies, at 350. An agency will not be able to create a new advisory committee if the combined total number of committees exceeds this cap, unless the agency obtains a waiver from the OMB Director.

The new policy has been criticized as another attack on science by the Trump Administration. “For the past two years they have been shrinking and restricting the role of federal science advisory committees. Now they’re removing the possibility of even making decisions based on

robust science advice,” said Gretchen Goldman, Research Director at the Union of Concerned Scientists’ Center for Science and Democracy.

Chairwoman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), has sent [letters](#) to the Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Transportation, Environmental Protection Agency, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Institute of Standards and Technology, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and National Science Foundation (NSF), soliciting information about how the departments and agencies plan to implement the Order. Chairwoman Johnson questioned the Order’s presumption that one-third of the advisory committees established by agencies “have exhausted their usefulness.” She said, “While this Order is unlikely to reduce federal spending, it will certainly make the advisory process more opaque to the American public...FACAs are a critical element to ensuring federal agencies operate in the best interest of the American people and an invaluable piece of the American science and technology enterprise.” She has asked agencies to provide a list of FACA committees that are eligible for elimination under the Order and metrics used to determine whether a committee should be cut by August 1, 2019.

House Pumps Breaks on Administration Plans to Relocate Science Agencies

Lawmakers in the House have approved language in recently passed appropriations bills to prevent the relocation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s research agencies outside the National Capital Region and part of U.S. Geological Surveys’ headquarters to the western United States.

In its FY 2020 budget request, USGS had proposed “establishing a headquarters presence in the West” as a part of a larger reorganization effort at the Department of the Interior. The agency proposed relocating key leaders and staff from the Reston, Virginia office to Lakewood, Colorado in order to “improve support, engagement and collaboration with the Interior resource management agencies, the U.S. Forest Service, and other stakeholders and partners whose activities are concentrated in the West.” The agency did not specify which staff positions and functions would be moved.

In June 2019, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced that the two USDA research agencies will relocate from Washington, DC to the Kansas City region by September 30, 2019 to increase efficiencies and bring resources closer to stakeholders. More than 500 positions at the two agencies will be relocated, while 97 positions will remain in Washington, DC. Employees were instructed to decide whether they will move and let the department know by July 15, 2019. According to employee responses received by USDA, the two research agencies are facing significant attrition, with only 145 employees at NIFA and ERS indicating that they intend to move with the agencies to Kansas City, while 250 either said they won’t or declined to provide a response. According to a USDA spokeswoman, “These anticipated ranges were taken into account in the Department’s long-term strategy, which includes both efforts to ensure separating employees have the resources they need as well as efforts to implement an aggressive hiring strategy to maintain the continuity of ERS and NIFA’s work.”

Skeptical of these relocation proposals, lawmakers in the House have passed a fiscal year (FY) 2020 Agriculture appropriations bill that includes language barring the USDA from relocating ERS and NIFA outside the National Capital Region. Several stakeholder groups have written to Senate Appropriators [urging](#) them to also prohibit the use of any federal funds for relocating the agencies. Additionally, the FY 2020 Interior-Environment spending bill would prevent the USGS from using any federal funds for relocating its headquarters functions to the West. According to the legislation, such a relocation “would dramatically change the organization, have significant financial costs, and impact the Survey’s effectiveness and strategic national-level partnerships with Federal agencies, States, scientific organizations, and stakeholders.”

The measures require Senate concurrence as well as approval from the White House.

NSF Announces Policy on Foreign Government Talent Recruitment Programs

On July 11, 2019, the National Science Foundation (NSF) issued a new personnel policy that outlines the obligations of NSF personnel and Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) assignees with respect to foreign government talent recruitment programs. The policy was announced in conjunction with a “Dear Colleague Letter” on research protections from NSF Director France Cordova.

According to NSF, open scientific exchange is facing a challenge from foreign government talent recruitment programs, which “disregard intellectual and other proprietary rights, and reflect foreign state-sponsored attempts to acquire U.S. funded scientific research through foreign government run or funded recruitment programs that target scientists, engineers, academics, researchers, and entrepreneurs of all nationalities working or educated in the United States.” Such programs “threaten to compromise the values of openness, transparency, collaboration, and integrity of science and engineering research.”

Under the [policy](#), NSF personnel and IPAs detailed to NSF are not permitted to participate in any foreign government talent recruitment programs, because there is a risk that such participation could violate ethical conduct principles detailed in an Executive Order, which requires NSF personnel and IPAs to “place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws, and ethical principles above private gain” and prohibits them from holding “financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.” According to Director Cordova, such participation also “poses significant risks of inappropriate foreign influence on NSF policies, programs, and priorities, including the integrity of NSF’s merit review process—risks we simply cannot accept.”

Failure to comply with the policy could result in disciplinary action, which includes removal from Federal Service and referral to the Office of Inspector General.

The [letter](#) from Director Cordova detailed other NSF policies related to foreign influence and collaborations, such as a requirement issued in April 2018 that rotators working onsite at NSF must be U.S. citizens or have applied for U.S. citizenship and another requirement that

researchers appropriately disclose all foreign and domestic sources of support. NSF is also proposing an electronic system for submission of biographical sketches, including disclosure of all appointments and support, which will become effective in January 2020. Additionally, the agency has commissioned an independent scientific advisory group JASON to conduct a study into issues related to open science and security. The study will recommend practices for NSF to protect its merit review system and achieve “balance between openness and security of science.”

Museums for All Informational Webinar

Museums for All is an initiative dedicated to expanding community access. Join staff from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Association of Children’s Museums on July 25 at 1 p.m. Eastern to learn more about how and why 400 museums participate in the program.

Find more information about how to join the webinar here:

<https://www.ims.gov/webinars/museums-all-informational-webinar>

BLM Headquarters to be Relocated to Colorado

The Department of the Interior announced on July 16 that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is planning to relocate its Washington, DC-based headquarters to Grand Junction, Colorado.

According to *E&E news*, out of the nearly 500 BLM employees based in Washington, DC, only 61 will likely remain in the capital, while the vast majority will be moved out West, to offices in Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and other western states. The move has support from Colorado lawmakers, Senator Cory Gardner (R) and Representative Scott Tipton (R). House Natural Resources Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), however, criticized the lack of public information and justification for the move.

The plan to relocate BLM headquarters to the West is in line with earlier decisions by the Trump Administration to relocate two Department of Agriculture research agencies and part of the U.S. Geological Survey’s headquarters outside the National Capital Region.

World Biodiversity Forum Accepting Proposals

The World Biodiversity Forum is now accepting proposals for thematic sessions and interactive workshops, which cut across disciplines, cover a diversity of perspectives, and address current issues. The Forum aims to redefine and set the agenda for biodiversity as a focal point over the next 10 years and supports the “New Deal for Nature” to be established by the Convention on Biological Diversity by the end of 2020. The deadline for submissions is August 4, 2019.

More information at: <https://www.worldbiodiversityforum.org/en/participate>

New Global Effort to Speed Species Discovery

The International Barcode of Life (iBOL) consortium is launching a 7-year, \$180 million, global effort called BIOSCAN to accelerate species discovery, study species interactions, and track species dynamics at 2500 sites around the world with support from 30 international partners. This initiative follows a 2010 iBOL effort that built a reference library with 7.3 million “barcodes” or distinguishing DNA sequences of known species.

The new [effort](#) aims to expand the reference library by 15 million barcode records, with 90 percent of them coming from undescribed species. The new data will enable efforts for monitoring the effects of pollution, land-use changes, and global warming on biodiversity, said Paul Hebert at the University of Guelph in Canada, who is leading the effort, according to *Science*.

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.

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