



# American Association of Geographers

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Douglas Richardson

March 21, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman  
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chairman  
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Frelinghuysen and Ranking Members Leahy and Lowey,

On behalf of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), I am writing to express our concerns with the Administration's budget proposal that was released last week.

If enacted, these historic cuts would eviscerate the Federal government's ability to protect the environment; remain a leader in climate science and other critical scientific fields; ensure a quality and well-rounded education for all young Americans; and foster peace and prosperity through strong diplomatic capacity. We urge Congress to reject these aspects of the budget and to pass appropriations that would maintain and enhance our nation's standing as a global leader in innovation and so many other important indicators. In addition to our broad concern with this reckless budget, we also take particular issue with the following:

- The Administration includes \$9 billion (14%) in cuts to the **Department of Education**. This reduction would cripple education in the U.S. and undermine work being carried out to fully implement the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was the first federal law to include extensive authorizations for K-12 geography education grants.

- The Administration's \$2.6 billion (31%) cut for the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** would gut efforts by U.S. scientists to protect our environment and to understand environmental threats to our nation and planet. Geographers and colleagues do necessary research to help us understand the natural and human factors that degrade the environment and endanger safety and health in the U.S. and around the world.

- The budget includes hundreds of millions of dollars cuts to the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**, which would curtail the work of geographers and related scientists in many vital research areas important to the U.S. and other countries. The proposal specifically

targets the Sea Grant program, which is crucial to understanding and managing coastlines and ocean waters off our coast, for elimination.

- The \$5.8 billion reduction for the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** will seriously hamper the critical work carried out by intramural and extramural NIH researchers – including geographers and geospatial scientists – that helps save and extend lives and reduce the human suffering and financial impacts of diseases.
- Cuts to the **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)** would inhibit work by geographers and related scientists to study our world, map and update knowledge of its features, and to understand and monitor the processes that cause natural and manmade disasters.
- The Administration proposes \$10.1 billion in cuts to the **Department of State (and USAID)**. In the years ahead, a continued central role for diplomacy will be crucial in resolving current conflicts and avoiding new wars. The geographers who work at or with the Department of State support peace and promote understanding of how globalization and related factors are changing international dynamics.
- A reduction of \$102 million for critical earth science initiatives and grants at the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)**, which enable geographers and related scientists to study our changing planet. The NASA proposal calls for elimination of several key agency programs, including the Office of Education; the Deep Space Climate Observatory; and the Orbiting Carbon Observatory 3.
- The Administration proposes the elimination of funding for the **National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)**, which was budgeted at approximately \$150 million last year. The NEH's grant programs allow geographers and others to provide a well-rounded education for all our children.
- A reported \$1.3 billion cut to the **U.S. Coast Guard** would weaken the service's crucial search and rescue mission, as well as its ability to provide critical support to polar research missions.

As you begin work on the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2018, we ask you to develop legislation that eliminates or minimizes these devastating cuts. Our nation's prosperity and continued international status depends on investment in cutting-edge science and education programs that afford all Americans an opportunity to realize their full potential. The Administration's budget includes numerous proposals that would devastate the essential work being done at America's colleges and universities (and by scientists and educators in other settings). We urge you to reject the cuts we have outlined above, and other cuts in the currently-proposed budget that would undermine our country and its people.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions about the important issues I have outlined in this letter. We would be happy to meet with you or your staff to discuss how these proposed cuts would directly affect your constituents. If desired, we also would be willing to share the geographic expertise of our members and our geographical information systems analytical tools to assist in your analysis of the impacts of the budget proposals above, as well as alternative budget scenarios.

The AAG is a nonprofit scientific, research, and educational society with a current membership of over 12,000 individuals, including hundreds of geographers and geospatial scientists in your home states. Our members work in the public, private, and academic sectors to advance the theory, methods, and practice of geography.

Sincerely,



Douglas Richardson, PhD  
Executive Director