

Washington Insider

CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS

The 114th Congress ended its first session with the passage of a \$1.15 trillion omnibus appropriations bill that reflected positive developments for political science-related funding priorities. Signed into law by President Obama on December 18, the budget package for FY 2016 addresses funding interests across a range of key programs and areas, including the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and international education through Title VI and Fulbright-Hays. While the final funding package includes flat funding in some areas, it represents a notable improvement over legislation introduced earlier in the year. Earlier bills targeted the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate for cuts within the NSF budget and would have kept additional funding levels flat or reduced general funding levels for agencies supporting the humanities and international education.

The December 18 omnibus appropriations package for FY16 included \$7.463 billion in appropriations for NSF, which is \$119 million, or 1.6%, above the FY15 level and \$260 million below the President's budget request for FY16. The bill funds NSF's Research and Related Activities Account at \$6.033 billion, an increase of \$100 million, or 1.7%, compared to FY15 appropriations. Of note, the bill's explanatory statement specifies that funding for the NSF's SBE directorate "shall be up to" the FY15 level. Although this provision keeps the funding level flat, it replaces earlier House language that would have resulted in heavy cuts to SBE.

The year-end omnibus appropriations package increased funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in line with the President's budget request. The legislation provides \$147.9 million for NEH, which is a \$1.9 million, or 1.3%, increase over the FY15 level. Earlier bill language would have kept funding at FY 2015 levels.

Funding levels for Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs under the US Department of Education, which support international and foreign language education, stayed at FY 2015 levels. The December 18 omnibus appropriations legislation for FY16 provides \$65.103 million for HEA-Title VI and \$7.061 million for Fulbright-Hays, the same as FY15 levels and under the President's request for \$67.103 million and \$9.061 million, respectively. While keeping funding flat, the outcome is favorable compared to earlier Senate language that would have slashed appropriations for these programs by 35%.

On the reauthorization side, the House of Representatives voted 217–205 on May 20, 2015, to pass the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (HR 1806), which would authorize the NSF. The COMPETES Act provides for specific funding levels for each of the NSF directorates, departing from past practice and introducing targeted cuts. The bill authorizes the SBE directorate at \$150 million—45% below its FY15 funding level. The bill also includes flat funding for the NSF budget in FY 2016 and 2017 rather than the yearly increases in past enacted bills. At the end of 2015, and into the time of this writing, the Senate had not introduced a reauthorization

bill, but the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee initiated efforts in 2015 to gain input from the scientific community and other stakeholders as it develops reauthorization legislation.

APSA ACTIVITIES

APSA continued throughout 2015 and into 2016 to advocate for the discipline and inform members of Congress and the public about political science research and of the importance of the discipline. As an active member of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), and the Coalition for International Education, APSA participated in multiple initiatives and campaigns to advocate for political science.

The Association met with Members of Congress and their staff throughout the year. APSA staff and members also participated in advocacy days sponsored by COSSA and NHA, visiting a diverse range of offices in the House and Senate to stress the importance of funding for the social sciences and humanities. APSA remained active in meetings sponsored by the Coalition for National Science Funding, and also worked alongside other coalitions to track legislative developments and organize campaigns to highlight the importance of funding for the discipline.

As various developments in Congress addressed funding for the social sciences and humanities, APSA was active in informing Association members through updates on its website and in its newsletter and through action alerts at critical junctures in the legislative process. The Association joined other associations in writing letters to Members of Congress, signing on to joint letters, and issuing statements highlighting provisions in pending legislation that would harm political science and other disciplines.

The Association also was active in promoting broad understanding about the importance of political science research and activities. Following a congressional briefing on election forecasting in late 2014, APSA cosponsored a briefing in April 2015 with the American Chemical Society on policy frameworks addressing chemical use. A political scientist moderated the event. The Association also took part in the Coalition for National Science Funding's annual exhibition. At the event, which was attended by Members of Congress and their staff, the American National Election Studies displayed its work and discussed its research to provide a scientific account of change in the American electorate.

UPCOMING DEVELOPMENTS

In early 2016, Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) announced their intention to move forward quickly with the FY17 appropriations process, with the aim of passing all twelve appropriations bills on time through regular order, a goal which Congress has not achieved since 1994. As the year progresses, APSA will continue to remain active in tracking legislation affecting political science, notifying APSA membership of key developments, and advocating on behalf of the discipline. ■