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ESA IN DC

ESA Science Policy Fellows Visit Washington, DC

On October 20-22, the inaugural class of ESA Science Policy Fellows visited Washington, DC and attended meetings to learn more about federal agencies and non-federal entities of interest to entomologists. The Fellows met with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institution of Food and Agriculture, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, and the National Academies. The visit provided an opportunity for Fellows to interact with entomologists working within the federal government, and to gain exposure to their career paths.
Launched in 2014, the ESA Science Policy Fellows Program accepts five new Fellows each year for a two-year term. During their time in the program, Science Policy Fellows engage in a variety of virtual and in-person educational events to learn about how science policy and science funding decisions are made at the federal level. Fellows are also provided the opportunity to engage with lawmakers, legislative staff, and federal agency leaders in Washington, DC. In November, the second class of Fellows will convene at the ESA Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The objective of the Science Policy Fellows program is to develop a generation of scientists who are visible and effective advocates for entomology and entomological research.

Sources and Additional Information:


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**ESA Signs Climate Letter**

This month, ESA joined several other organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in a letter of support for House Resolution 424 on environmental stewardship. The resolution was introduced by Congressman Chris Gibson (R-NY-19) to express “the commitment of the House of Representatives to conservative environmental stewardship” and specifically addresses a “growing invasive species and insect problem” and other economic effects of a changing climate. The resolution included nine Republican Members as co-sponsors and urges the House of Representatives to base policy decisions “in science and quantifiable facts on the ground.” This resolution marks significant progress in the bipartisan discussion about climate change.

Sources and Additional Information:


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**ESA Signs Community Letter Supporting STEM Education**

Last month, ESA along with over 80 organizations signed a community letter to House and Senate education committee leadership supporting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education provisions within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Specifically, the letter endorses a provision of the legislation focused on improving STEM education and increasing access for students from groups underrepresented in STEM fields. The letter also highlights portions of House and Senate versions of the legislation that are favorable – including efforts to authorize programs that build STEM skills, authorizing non-profit STEM organizations to compete for funds supporting STEM teacher development, and using state and
local funds to develop STEM instructional materials – and urges lawmakers to include these provisions in the final legislation. The letter is addressed to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, and the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Sources and Additional Information:


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**Action Alert: Support Robust AFRI Funding for FY 2016**

As Congress works to finalize end of year appropriations, ESA members are encouraged to contact their Members of Congress to urge robust funding levels for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. AFRI was funded at $325 million in fiscal year (FY) 2015. For FY 2016, President Obama had proposed $450 million in his budget request, the House of Representatives proposed $335 million, and the Senate proposed flat funding. The agricultural research community is requesting AFRI be funded at the $335 million level proposed by the House, at a minimum.

Sources and Additional Information:

- For more information on finding your Members of Congress, please visit [https://www.opencongress.org/people/zipcodelookup](https://www.opencongress.org/people/zipcodelookup).

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**Event on Capitol Hill Highlights Innovation Statement**

On October 20, science and technology leaders from academia and industry held a symposium at the U.S. Capitol to bring attention to recommendations in the recently released statement, *Innovation: An American Imperative*. The statement was led by 10 industry leaders and signed by more than 325 organizations, including ESA.

The event featured remarks by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Senator Chris Coons (D-DE), Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), and Representative Randy Hultgren (R-IL), as well as a panel discussion by innovation industry executives. A webcast of the event will be available on the “innovation imperative” website, and those interested in the effort are encouraged to promote the statement on social media, using the hashtag “#InnovationImperative.”

The recommendations in the statement support investment in scientific discovery; strengthen the federal R&D tax credit; improve student achievement in science, technology, engineering, and
mathematics; reform U.S. visa policy; reduce or eliminate costly and inefficient regulations; protect merit-based peer review; and stimulate advanced manufacturing.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The “innovation imperative” website is available at [http://www.amacad.org/content/innovationimperative](http://www.amacad.org/content/innovationimperative).

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS

**House and Senate Agree to Major Budget Deal**

On October 30, Congress passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. This agreement alleviates sequestration for fiscal years (FY) 2016 and 2017 and extends the nation’s debt limit until March 2017, allowing the government to pay for existing obligations. The bill now heads to the White House where President Obama is expected to sign it into law.

The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 increases discretionary spending by $80 billion over two years, split evenly between defense and non-defense spending. This provides greater flexibility for House and Senate appropriators to increase funding for federal science agencies and education programs. The agreement sets overall funding levels for FY 2016 and FY 2017, laying the groundwork for negotiation of final FY 2016 appropriations bills before the current continuing resolution (CR) expires on December 11.

This agreement comes as Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) retires from Congress and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) assumes the role of Speaker of the House. Notably, the agreement does not address several controversial issues that have stymied appropriators, such as policy language targeting climate research. Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK), Chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, indicated that he would look to include report language in the final appropriations bills that target the Administration’s climate regulations.

Sources and Additional Information:

Pollinator Provision Included in Surface Transportation Reauthorization

On October 16, Congressman Bill Shuster (R-PA), Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, introduced the *Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015* (H.R. 3763). Unlike many authorization bills, which depend on annual appropriations to be realized, the $325 billion, six-year transportation bill would set policy and authorize new and existing programs at the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Notably, the bill includes language similar to the *Highways Bettering the Economy and Environment Pollinator Protection Act* (H.R. 2738; *Highways BEE Act*). The bill would recognize the importance of pollinator populations and would enable the creation of improved habitat and forage for pollinators, including bees, bats, birds, and butterflies, on rights-of-way adjacent to highways. This would be facilitated through the promotion of integrated vegetation management practices, including reduced mowing on roadsides, and the planting of native plants, including noninvasive native milkweed species.

While the draft House bill has bipartisan support, it remains unclear how its passage and subsequent conference with the Senate *DRIVE Act* will be affected by the ongoing turmoil within the House Republican Conference.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The text of the House *Highways BEE Act* (H.R. 2738) can be viewed at [https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr2738/BILLS-114hr2738ih.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr2738/BILLS-114hr2738ih.pdf).

Senate Agriculture Committee Holds Hearing on Biotechnology Regulation

On October 21, the Senate Agriculture Committee held a hearing entitled, “Agriculture Biotechnology: A Look at Federal Regulation and Stakeholder Perspectives.” The Committee convened two panels for a diversity of perspectives. The first panel was comprised of agency officials from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The second panel was comprised of organic and conventional producers as well as other stakeholder groups. The hearing focused on the safety of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and whether legislative intervention was needed for labeling of GMOs. The vast majority of Senators present at the hearing agreed that the most important thing was to be guided by the “best available science.”

This hearing marks the first time in ten years the Senate Committee has reviewed biotechnology, but comes in connection with a broader, government-wide assessment of how GMOs are
regulated at the federal level. More information on the comprehensive effort can be found in the “FDA, USDA, EPA, and OSTP Request Public Input on Agriculture Biotechnology Regulation” article included in this issue.

Sources and Additional Information:


FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

**USDA Announces New Partnership with Association of Science-Technology Centers**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) that would provide agricultural science and research resources for ASTC members. The ASTC is an international organization comprised of science centers, museums, companies, and other groups interested in “informal science education.” The MOU is part of USDA’s expanded extension efforts aimed at workforce development. This particular initiative was spearheaded by USDA Chief Scientist Dr. Catherine Wotecki, who credits her interest in agricultural sciences to childhood museum visits.

Source and Additional Information:


**FDA, USDA, EPA, and OSTP Request Public Input on Agriculture Biotechnology Regulation**

On October 16, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released a Request for Information (RFI) on “Clarifying Current Roles and Responsibilities Described in the Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology and Developing a Long-Term Strategy for the Regulation of the Products of Biotechnology” and announced a public meeting. This is the next step in a process initiated in July of this year by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). For the purposes of this RFI, biotechnology is defined as “products developed through genetic engineering or the targeted or in vitro manipulation of genetic information of organisms, including plants, animals, and microbes.”

Five specific questions are asked in the RFI. The questions focus on the themes of transparency, coordination, predictability, and efficiency. Additionally, helping consumers understand the role of federal regulation of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) is of importance to the coordinating body. Comments are being accepted through November 13, 2015 at 5pm EST. The
public meeting on October 30 will be recorded and an archived version will be available within five days.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The Federal Register notice of the Request for Information where formal comments can be submitted is available at https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/10/06/2015-25325/clarifying-current-roles-and-responsibilities-described-in-the-coordinated-framework-for-the.
- The meeting website, which will soon include an archived webcast, is available at http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/MeetingsConferencesWorkshops/ucm463783.htm.

Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research Hosts First Public Meeting

On October 28, the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) held its first public session during the Board of Directors meeting. The stated goal of the session was for outside organizations to offer comments on the seven initial research target areas identified by the FFAR board. The main themes of the comments were the value of public-private partnerships, zoonotic disease and antimicrobial resistance, basic versus applied portfolio balancing, and the importance of cross-disciplinary science.

Dr. Sally Rockey, FFAR Executive Director, also announced two new initial projects FFAR will be funding. First, the Foundation plans to launch a “New Innovators in Food and Agriculture Science” program whose purpose is to give substantial, unfettered awards to early career investigators to incentivize them to stay in agriculture research. The second project is the Rapid Response program, which will fund emerging or time-sensitive areas of research as they arise in a more nimble way than federal agencies are able to do. Both programs anticipate calls for applications in the very near future.

Sources and Additional Information:

- More information about FFAR and the Board of Directors can be found at http://www.far.foundation/.

President Obama Releases Updated Strategy for American Innovation

On October 21, the Obama Administration released an updated version of its Strategy for American Innovation, which was first issued in 2009 and was previously updated in 2011. The Strategy provides an overview of the Administration’s efforts to strengthen the innovation economy and calls for investments in emerging areas of science and technology proposed in the President’s fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget request.
In addition to highlighting the need to invest in basic research and avoid the harmful effects of sequestration, the *Strategy* identifies specific areas of scientific opportunity. The release of the *Strategy* and its funding recommendations comes at a key time when Congress begins reconsidering appropriations for FY 2016 in light of the new budget framework in the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015*.

**Sources and Additional Information:**