

## **Congress Concerned that Administration's Science Decisions are Subverted by Ideology**

A dozen members of Congress recently sent a letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy Thompson expressing concern about "a pattern of events at [HHS] suggesting that scientific decision making is being subverted by ideology and that scientific information that does not fit the Administration's political agenda is being suppressed." This concern arises due to "a series of troubling reports [that] have come out casting doubt on the Administration's commitment to the tradition of scientific excellence and science-based decision making at HHS." Apparently, "scientific information that does not serve the Administration's ideological agenda is being removed from HHS websites. Expert appointments to scientific advisory boards are going to individuals with specific ideological viewpoints rather than scientific credentials."

The signatories asked the Secretary to respond to six queries by October 30. The queries were to list: 1) All instances where scientific information has been removed from any HHS web site, the nature of the information, who requested its removal, and the scientific basis for its removal; 2) The name of each HHS member whose employment has been terminated since January 2001 and the reason(s) for their removal; 3) The names and scientific qualifications of each expert recommended for the position of Chair of the Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory committee, who recommended the member, and the reason for the final selection, if any; 4) The names of each HHS member of which the Administration has replaced, or plans to replace within the next year; 5) HHS and CDC policies on audits and a description of the controls in place to ensure that the process is not subject to political abuse; 6) The number of audits the HHS or CDC have undertaken or planned of HIV/AIDS prevention education groups, groups that oppose abstinence-only policies, and abstinence-only programs.

As of November 4, Secretary Thompson had yet to respond to the letter.

## **New Reporting Requirement for Department of State Historical Advisory Committee**

On September 30, 2002, President Bush signed into law H.R. 1646, the State Department FY 2000–2003 Authorizations bill. This legislation includes a new provision in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act which relates to the duties of the Department of State Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation.

Section 205 of this legislation requires that by March 1 of each year the Secretary of State must submit "a report . . . to identify the number of Foreign Relations of the U.S. (FRUS) volumes published in the previous calendar year" and to assess "the degree to which the Department is not in compliance with the deadline set forth in [the 30 year statutory deadline]" as well as to describe the "factors relevant to the inability of the Department to comply with the provisions of this title." This report provision will draw better attention to the mandated publishing requirements of the FRUS series.

## **Historic Preservation Bill Signed into Law**

On August 21, 2002, the Public Building, Property, and Works Act (P. L. 107-217) was signed into law. This law, whose passage is celebrated by historians and historical preservation advocates alike, promotes the authorization of new historical monuments and facilitates the creation of, and impedes the destruction of, existing historical monuments. The General Service Administration (GSA) now exercises greater jurisdiction in determining which landmarks and buildings are considered "political subdivisions or instrumentality of the State." The GSA can now convert any "surplus real and related personal property that is suitable and desirable for the use of historic monuments for the benefit of the public" and that such property may be used for "revenue-producing activity." The Act also dictates that the GSA must submit an annual report to the president and Congress each January reporting how it has "protected and enhanced" significant historic monuments and which efforts it will embark upon in the upcoming fiscal year to continue its historic preservation work.

## **Homeland Security Bill Threatens Freedom of Information Act**

Lawyers for the American Library Association believe that provisions in the president's newly enacted Homeland Security Act raise "troubling questions as well as confusion" over the Act's empowerment of industry. Anything a company now determines "critical infrastructure information" can be kept secret. The word "information" is very broadly defined in the bill, allowing companies to protect virtually all of their documents from the public. In addition, the Act allows criminal penalties for whistle-blowers exposing fraud and waste. Also, federal employees now have the right to trace electronic communications, including email, without first obtaining a court order. Finally, the bill empowers the federal government to trump any states' FOIA protections. Already, public access, openness in government, and accountability groups ready to battle the bill's draconian measures when it is revisited in the next Congress.

*Sources for this column include the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History's NCC Washington Update, the Chronicle of Higher Education, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations' Washington Update.*