

Declassification Board Stalled

The Public Interest Declassification Board (PIDB) is unlikely to be able to act on its first request from Congress to review the classification status of two controversial reports, the National Coalition for History reported in November.

The request was initially made in September by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and chairman Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS), who, along with other members of the committee, contended that two reports on prewar Iraq intelligence were over-classified. However, the statute guiding the operations of the PIDB requires that a request be submitted by both the committee of jurisdiction and the president. The Committee has submitted its formal request, but as of early November, the White House has yet to indicate whether it intends to comply with the request. The National Coalition for History reports that analysts agree that the Administration is unlikely to do so.

The PIDB was created in 2000 "to serve as an advisory body on declassification priorities and policies." President Bush did not appoint anyone to serve on the Board until 2005, however, and the Board saw its first annual appropriation in FY2006.

Joint Center Names New President and CEO

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a major African-American think tank, named Ralph B. Everett as its new president and CEO.

Everett came to the Center after more than 15 years as a partner at Paul, Hatings, Janofsky & Walker, LLP, a leading international law firm, where he has specialized in matters pertaining to the legislative and executive branches, as well as independent regulatory agencies. In 1982, he was appointed the Democratic staff director and minority chief counsel of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, becoming the first African American to head a U.S. Senate committee staff. He later served as staff director and chief counsel to the full committee when Senate Democrats won majority control in 1986.

The Joint Center was founded in 1970 to assist newly-elected Black officials and has since expanded its mission to inform public policy through research on disparities in health care, improving the socioeconomic status of Black Americans, and expanding their participation in the political process.

FY 2007 Appropriations Left to New Congress

The 109th Congress adjourned early in the morning, December 9, leaving incomplete nine of 11 appropriations bills for FY2007, which began on October 1. It passed a continuing resolution to fund federal programs at FY2006 levels through February 15, but the incoming Democratic committee leaders announced their intentions to extend current levels until the beginning of FY2008 and to implement a moratorium on earmarks until further lobbying regulations are passed.

Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Representative David Obey (D-OH), the new chairpersons of the appropriations committees, issued this statement, quoted in the *Washington Post*: "While the results will be far from ideal, this path provides the best way to dispose of the unfinished business quickly, and allow governors, state and local officials, and families to finally plan for the coming year with some knowledge of what the federal government is funding." However, for those agencies hoping to start new programs in FY2007, this is bad news. The Office of Management and Budget asked for special attention to a number of programs, including the Census Bureau's efforts to complete its questionnaire and prepare for the 2008 rehearsal.

In any event, the alternative to Byrd and Obey's proposed extension of current funding levels through the end of FY 2007 is to resume work on the spending bills in January and February, when Democrats hope to focus attention on other legislative efforts and when President Bush is scheduled to present his FY2008 budget request.

Census Chiefs Resign

The top two officials at the U.S. Census Bureau, C. Louis Kincannon and Hermann Habermann, resigned their positions in November. Kincannon, appointed director by President Bush in 2002, officially cited family reasons, but observers noted growing tensions between Census statisticians and political officials on Capitol Hill.

The Census receives heavy scrutiny from Congress because its reported numbers determine many key issues, from representation to highway funding. Controversy has arisen over the Bureau's methods for counting hard-to-reach populations, such as certain minority groups, renters, and immigrants, who tend to vote Democratic. Kincannon addressed the matter in his resignation letter, insisting that the methods currently used by the Bureau are scientifically sound.

The two resignations come as the Census Bureau faces budget shortfalls while ramping up its preparation for the 2010 enumeration.

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.