

ABOUT AGU

Inside Politics With AGU's Congressional Science Fellow

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One definition of pork is money, jobs, etc. received through pork-barrel congressional appropriations and used for political patronage.

However, pork is only pork if that swine farm is located in somebody else's congressional district. If the project is in your district, rest assured that it is absolutely necessary for the safety and well-being of your constituents and the vitality of America as a whole. (That \$650 million soil ion conductance lab at Southern State College is absolutely essential to the future of the American economy, right?)

Thus, we come to the transportation bill (known in the U.S. Senate as S.1072, or by its popular name, SAFE-TEA), which, when passed by the Senate in February, was pork-free (save for two "essential" \$50 million bridge projects in the home states of high-ranking members). SAFE-TEA will not be staying that way for long, however. The U.S. House of Representatives passed its own version (H.R. 3550) in April, and both chambers will meet soon in a conference to iron out differences between their bills. The Senate-House committee's merged bill will likely be laden with hundreds of individual projects totaling in the billions of dollars (a.k.a. pork).

Now, here is why this American Geophysical Union Fellow is writing about pork and transportation.

Most everything in Congress is run through committees (about 20 in each body and four joint committees). Every piece of legislation

introduced in the Senate or House is referred to a committee for initial consideration, vetting, and action. The senator I have worked for sits on the Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW), which covers both the "E" and the "PW." So even though my entire educational life has been focused on the "E," I also field the completely foreign "PW." That is the way congressional staffs work. An ability to quickly absorb and order disparate information is more valuable than a specialized and parochial skill.

The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that \$1 billion spent on highways creates 47,000 jobs. SAFE-TEA is thus the Jobs Bill, and because the constituents I help serve are faced with the highest unemployment rate in the United States, I was assigned to work on S.1072 from my first day in the office. In this capacity, I have met with lobbyists, other staffs, federal agencies, and state representatives, all of whom have some stake in the legislation. I interact and listen, trying to find common ground between national and state interests. I listen as emissaries explain the state's direct transportation needs. I try to decide what actions my senator can take to best serve his constituents. I research and anticipate potential amendments offered by other senators, and generally prepare the senator to vote on the bill and speak publicly about it.

But let's return to pork. A \$320 billion legislative package does strange things to our elected representatives, especially during floor debate. Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania shared

his Washington axiom: Never get between a congressman and asphalt, because you're going to get run over (a play on a well-trodden Washington quip in which "asphalt" is replaced with "camera"). He tried anyway and got run over. Senator John McCain of Arizona, who famously hates pork and high spending, yelled, "when is the Republican Party going to find its soul?" And Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison called Texas a "super donor" (meaning that her state pays more in fuel taxes than it receives back from the federal government).

So what do these three senators have in common, and why are they complaining? They represent states not doing so well under S.1072. How a senator feels about the bill depends not so much on high-minded national policy, but on whether his or her state is being shortchanged. Arizona, Texas, and Pennsylvania will get less than most other states under the SAFE-TEA bill.

Local interests trump political ideology when it comes to building roads, and party affiliation no longer unifies members. Oklahoma Republican James Inhofe proclaimed that he is a fiscal conservative, except for national defense and infrastructure. Being chairman of the Committee on Environment and Public Works, Inhofe makes sure that his state fares well in this bill.

I came into the Fellowship expecting a policy job, but I was wrong. This is a politics job, and I have quickly learned that policy is made through politics. I say this not derisively, though; the construction of political deals to achieve final policy is wholly legitimate. In Congress, policy is made through a tortured process designed to make sure that 60% of the constituency can live with the outcome. In a country so geographically, culturally, and economically diverse, there is simply no other way.

—KEVIN VRANES, AGU 2003–2004 Congressional Science Fellow

Outstanding Student Paper Awards: Planetary Sciences, Seismology, Tectonophysics

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The following members in the Planetary Sciences, Seismology, and Tectonophysics Sections received Outstanding Student Paper Awards at the 2004 AGU/CGU Joint Assembly in Montreal, Canada. (Winners in other sections and focus groups will be announced in subsequent issues of Eos.)

Planetary Sciences

C. W. Hamilton, Dalhousie University, *Identification of volcanic rootless cones and impact craters using artificial neural networks*

Jiri Pavlu, Charles University, *Space dust charging: laboratory simulation*

Darren L. Smith, Carleton University, *Petrophysical characterization of stony meteorites using low field magnetic susceptibility: initial results from anisotropy measurements*

Seismology

Matt Knuth, The Pennsylvania State University, *Dimensional analysis in granular mechanics: the role of surface properties and material properties*

Meredith Nettles, Harvard University, *Advances in global and regional tomography using the GSN*

Kyle Straub, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Upper mantle structure of the slave craton from teleseismic body-wave tomography*

Tectonophysics

Pascal Audet, GEOTOP-UQAM-McGill, Canada, *Mechanical anisotropy of the lithosphere in the Canadian Shield*

H. Claire Perry, Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris, *Particular mantle dynamics induced by continental roots*

Neil Hurst, University of Liverpool, *Predicting rifted continental margin subsidence history from satellite gravity derived crustal thinning: application to North Atlantic margins*

Sarah Zaranek, Brown University, *Effects of basal drag and ablation on the evolution of cratonic lithosphere*