



THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA® **Geoscience Policy**

January 2024

Welcome and Happy New Year!

As 2024 kicks off, it brings with it an election year with plenty of exciting legislation and policy updates here in Washington, D.C. We at GSA want to keep you informed on all things policy that could affect the geosciences, and so we have developed this Public Policy Newsletter. The purpose of this monthly newsletter is to provide updates and information on legislation and events that GSA's Policy Office is tracking.

In this newsletter, we look back on GSA's policy engagement from 2023 (including the Fall Geosciences Congressional Visit Days and the Fall Geology and Public Policy Committee Meeting), as well as looking forward to the upcoming events in early 2024. We are also providing a list of ongoing legislation that may be of interest to GSA members. By providing this information in an easily-digestible format, we hope to continue to foster a community of informed geoscientists that are well-prepared to engage and inform policy decisions at the local, state, federal, and international levels!

Joshua Martin, *GSA Science Policy Fellow 2023-2024*



Table of Contents

<i>A Message from the Executive Director</i>	2
<i>Geosciences Congressional Visit Days 2023</i>	2
<i>Appropriations Update</i>	3
<i>Relevant Legislation</i>	4
<i>Updates from the GPPC</i>	6
<i>Information on the Geology and Society Division</i>	7
<i>Geology and Public Policy Committee</i>	7

A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Members,

As the Executive Director and CEO of the Geological Society of America, I am excited to connect with you through this edition of the GSA Public Policy Newsletter.

Our role in shaping policy through scientific insights has never been more critical. The intersection of geoscience research and public policy spans a broad spectrum, from enhancing natural disaster preparedness to ensuring responsible and sustainable mining of critical minerals. These efforts are integral to our environmental resilience and technological progress. At GSA, we are dedicated to championing science-based policies, and your contributions to this endeavor are invaluable.

I encourage you to reflect on how your work intersects with public policy and how the GSA can support you in amplifying your voice. By working together, we can ensure that geoscience continues to be a key influence in forging a sustainable and resilient future.

Sincerely,

Melanie Brandt, *Executive Director and CEO Geological Society of America*



Geosciences Congressional Visit Days 2023

On September 13-14, 2023, GSA teamed up with the American Geophysical Union, the American Meteorological Society, and the Seismological Society of America to host the Geosciences Congressional Visits Day (Geo-CVD). In total, we welcomed 21 participants representing 12 different states to learn more about the intersections of geoscience and the federal government, and meet with their state senators and representatives to advocate for the geosciences. Participants were led through a series of workshops and panel discussions on Wednesday before heading to Capitol Hill to meet with their representatives on Thursday afternoon. In these meetings, the participants were able to share the importance of the geosciences with congressional staffers, while asking that members of congress prioritize funding for geoscience during the ongoing appropriations process.





Legislative Updates

US Budget Appropriations Update

- **Background:** The government's budget in a given year is set by a series of 12 appropriations bills, each funding specific agencies and departments of the government. After the 2023 fiscal year ended on September 30th, 2023 with no new appropriations bills passed, the government remained open through a stopgap funding bill that kept the government funded at 2023 levels through November 17th. On November 16th, 2023, another Continuing Resolution (C.R.) was signed into law, keeping parts of the government funded through February 2nd, 2024, and others through January 19th, 2024. On January 18th, an additional C.R. was passed, extending these dates to March 1st, 2024 and March 8th, 2024.
- **Bipartisan Deal Struck:** Congressional leaders have reached a pivotal agreement on the appropriations bills for fiscal 2024, setting the stage for detailed budget drafting. While many geoscience-relevant programs, such as the USGS, NSF, NOAA, and NASA will remain funded under the most recent continuing resolution until March 8th, this breakthrough is vital ahead of a potential shutdown.
- **Spending Limits Agreed:** The deal outlines spending limits for defense and nondefense programs. Defense funding is set at \$886 billion, marking a 3% increase. Nondefense funding is pegged at nearly \$773 billion, almost flat compared to current funding, translating to a less than 1% decrease.
- **Potential Outcomes:** If full-year funding agreements aren't reached by the new March deadlines, Congress might enact another continuing resolution (CR).
- **What's Next:** Lawmakers face a race against time to finalize appropriations. The recent deals, while a step forward, leaves many policy riders and controversial issues to be resolved.

The current agreement represents a crucial step towards averting a government shutdown. However, the road ahead remains challenging with tight deadlines and significant policy debates looming.

In addition to the ongoing appropriations process, GSA is monitoring a number of bills that are relevant to and informed by geoscientists. The following are summaries of some of the legislation we are tracking.

Legislation on Mining and Critical Minerals

S. 1742 – Clean Energy Minerals Reform Act of 2023

- **Background:** This bill, introduced by Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM), seeks to modernize hardrock mining regulations. The bill establishes annual payments for claimed public land, sets royalty rates based on gross income from production on federal land, and address environmental concerns by enabling states and tribes to petition for lands to be withdrawn from mining, while also establishing a reclamation fund to be used for abandoned mine cleanup. Proponents have emphasized the need for environmental safeguards and ensuring fair economic returns for the public land, while opponents are concerned that these regulations are burdensome and will affect the United States' ability to develop a domestic supply chain for critical minerals.
- **Status:** The bill has been sent to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining. A hearing to receive testimony on this bill was held on December 12, 2023.

S. 1281 – Mining Regulatory Clarity Act of 2023

- **Background:** This bill, introduced by Sen. Catherine Cortez-Masto (D-NV), establishes a process that would allow mining operations to occupy and establish infrastructure on public land regardless of whether mineral deposits have been discovered there. Proponents argue that the bill is a necessary step in developing a robust domestic supply chain for critical minerals that will be vital to meet consumer demand for electric vehicles and a clean energy transition. Opponents raise concerns over the environmental impact and land use in areas where valuable minerals are not yet proven to exist.
- **Status:** The bill has been sent to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining. A hearing to receive testimony on this bill was held on December 12, 2023.

S. 912 – Mining Schools Act of 2023

- **Background:** This bill would require the Department of Energy to establish a grant program to support domestic mining education by awarding up to 10 grants each year to mining schools for recruiting and educating qualified professionals to meet future energy and mineral needs.
- **Status:** The bill was sent to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining. This bill has received bipartisan support and was reported without amendment favorably, and has been placed on the legislative calendar to be voted on by the Senate. An Identical bill, H.R.2685, has been introduced in the House of Representatives and was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, where a hearing was held on June 14, 2023.

H.R. 752 – Securing Semiconductor Supply Chains Act of 2023

- **Background:** This bill, introduced by Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-CA), directs the Department of Commerce to develop strategies for attracting investment in United States semiconductor manufacturers and their related supply chains. It emphasizes identifying resource gaps and challenges in semiconductor manufacturing. Given the importance of critical minerals mining in the semiconductor supply chain, strengthening the United States semiconductor industry will require robust investment to critical minerals mining and research.
- **Status:** This bill has received bipartisan support, and has passed in the House of Representatives. A companion bill, S. 229 - introduced by Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI), was introduced and passed in the Senate.

Legislation Relevant to International Science and Scientists

S. 2632 – Visa Processing Improvement Act

- **Background:** This bill, introduced by Sens. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Jerry Moran (R-KS), seeks to address a backlog in nonimmigrant visas, which would include those for scientists travelling internationally to attend conferences. The bill expands the eligibility for in-person interview waivers and establishes a pilot program for remote video conference interviews as an alternative to in-person interviews.
- **Status:** The bill was introduced on July 27, 2023 and referred to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary.
- **Related Bills:**
 - S. 979, “H-1B and L-1 Visa Reform Act of 2023”, Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL)
 - H.R. 1535, “Eliminating Backlogs Act of 2023”, Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-IN)
 - S. 493, “Securing the Visa Waiver Program Act of 2023”, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL)

H.R. 401 – American Science First Act

- **Background:** This bill seeks to prioritize American research by blocking NSF grants to entities that might work to advance technologies used by the Chinese military. Proponents of the bill argue that the act is crucial for protecting intellectual property and maintaining the United States’ competitive edge in science and technology, while opponents raise concerns over the impact this would have on international collaboration and the broader impact it may have on research and development.
- **Status:** The bill was introduced in the House of Representatives on January 20, 2023 and was referred to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.

Legislation on Weather and Climate

H.R. 6093 – Weather Act Reauthorization Act of 2023

- Background: This bill, introduced by Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) seeks to enhance the United States' weather system by modernizing and expanding the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) capabilities. This includes research to improve forecasting of severe weather like tornados and hurricanes, expanding access to data through the Commercial Data Program, and improving communication of weather and water events to the public.
- Status: This bill was referred to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on October 26, 2023. It was amended and passed by the committee on December 11, 2023, and has been placed on the legislative calendar to be voted on by the House of Representatives.

S. 3606 – A Bill To Reauthorize the Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act of 1977

- Background: This bill, introduced by Sen. Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) would reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP). Specifically, this bill would authorize \$10.6 million for FEMA, \$5.9 million for NIST, \$58 million for NSF, and \$100.9 million for USGS per year from 2024-2028. This funding would support research, development and implementation activities related to earthquake safety and risk reduction.
- Status: This bill was introduced in the Senate on January 17, 2024 and was referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

New from the GPPC

During the Annual fall meeting of the Geology and Public Policy Committee (GPPC), held on October 10, 2023 at the Connects 2023 Meeting in Pittsburgh, PA, the committee updated two expiring position statements:

Managing U.S. Coastal Hazards

- Specific figures on the financial cost and jobs affected by coastal hazards in the rationale section were updated to reflect the changing and uncertain nature of these figures moving forward.
- Added language clarifying that the frequency and magnitude of these hazards are expected to increase.

Diversity in the Geosciences

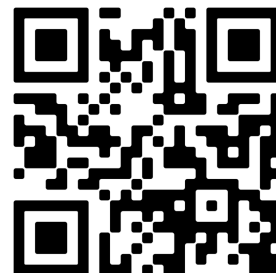
- Addressed comments provided by GSA members by adding references to religious diversity and tokenism.

During the upcoming Spring 2024 GPPC meeting, the committee is set to discuss the development of position statements on Water Resources: Quality, and The Benefits of Professional Geologist Licensure, and review the expiring position statement on The Role of Geoscientists in Ensuring the Safety and Integrity of Infrastructure. Immediately after the Spring 2024 GPPC meeting, committee members and GSA staff members will visit Capitol Hill to meet with policymakers and advocate for the geosciences!

GSA's Updated Community Page

Do you have information on a new study that could inform policy, or questions about the impact of a piece of legislation? Join GSA's Geology and Society Division and share it with us on the updated Community site! This is a space for sharing and discussing the many intersections of Geology and Society, including science policy, and we'd love to hear from you! To join:

- Go to <https://community.geosociety.org/gsocdivision/join>
- Sign in using your GSA membership credentials.
- Click "Join the G&S Division"!



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Representative

Eric Lane Schuemann, North-Central Section
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Representative

Sylvia R. Nicovich, Rocky Mtn Section Representative

Joe Gillman, Association of American State
Geologists Representative

Robby Goldman, Congressional Science Fellow

Hannah Palmer, Immediate Past Congressional

Science Fellow

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