Senator Murkowski and Representative Holt Receive AASG Pick and Gavel Award

For Immediate Release
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The Association of American State Geologists (AASG) proudly presented Senator Lisa Murkowski (R), Alaska, and Representative Rush Holt (D), Twelfth District of New Jersey, with the 2010 Pick and Gavel Award on March 16, 2010. The Pick and Gavel Award honors those who have made significant contributions to advancing the role of geoscience in public policy and those who have supported AASG’s goals in national policy.

Senator Lisa Murkowski has been a longtime advocate of legislation that supports funding and authorization of programs benefitting the geosciences. She co-sponsored the reauthorization of the National Geologic Mapping Act in 2007, which passed as part of the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act in 2009. In addition, she co-sponsored the reauthorization and expansion of the Methane Hydrates Research Act and helped gain the approval of the Ocean and Coastal Mapping Integration Act.

Not only has Senator Murkowski played a key role in the aforementioned legislation, but she has also been a champion of responsible natural resource development as Ranking Member of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Her work in this arena has included proposing directional drilling in a small area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, promoting geothermal and marine hydrokinetic energy development in the 2005 and 2007 energy bills, co-sponsoring legislation to fund carbon capture and storage projects in coal production, and leading an effort to resume the mining of rare earth elements in the United States. In accepting the Pick and Gavel Award, Senator Murkowski expressed the importance of the geosciences to U.S. economic well-being, saying “our nation can find and produce the materials vital to our economy.”

In addition to her work on resource development, Senator Murkowski co-chairs the Congressional Hazard Caucus and introduced S.782 which would establish a National Volcano Early Warning System. This system would provide stable funding for the five U.S. volcano observatories.

Of high importance to the geosciences, Senator Murkowski sponsored an amendment to the American Clean Energy Leadership Act of 2009 that authorizes funding for a grant program for the construction of geologic data repositories. This data is crucial for oil and gas, hydrologic studies, geothermal energy, and carbon capture and storage.

Representative Holt has been a strong supporter of the sciences as a Member of Congress. He serves on the Committee on Natural Resources and on the Subcommittees for Energy and Minerals, and Parks and Lands. Through his efforts, more than $700 million in new federal funding was secured for science and technology research. Holt was also instrumental in passing an amendment to the Land and Water Conservation Fund which provided millions of dollars to protect open space. Most importantly, Congressman Holt sponsored the Public Lands Omnibus Bill (H.R. 146), which contained the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program Reauthorization and the Secure Water Act, both of which were strongly supported by AASG.
In accepting his award, Representative Holt thanked the state geologists for their 100 years of service. He went on to say “geology is an old but very current profession of enormous importance.” His efforts ensure quality geoscience will continue to be supported by the U.S. Congress.

David Wunsch, the State Geologist of New Hampshire, and President of AASG, remarked “Senator Murkowski and Representative Holt are exemplary champions of the geosciences on Capitol Hill. Their support of programs by sponsoring legislation, procuring funding, and serving on science, energy, and resource committees has ensured the growth of strong earth science programs within the United States. Their efforts make them eminently deserving of the 2010 AASG Pick and Gavel Award.”

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The Association of American State Geologists (AASG) represents the chief executives of the geologic bureaus of the 50 states and the commonwealth territories of the United States. The Association promotes the activities of the state geological surveys through coordination, outreach, partnerships, and by speaking as a unified voice with federal partners. For additional information please contact David Wunsch at (603) 271-6482, or david.wunsch@des.nh.gov, or Jim Cobb at (859) 323-0559, or cobb@email.uky.edu.