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APPROPRIATIONS HEARINGS: OSTP, NSF, AND THE CHAIRMAN'S DAUGHTER'S SCIENCE PROJECT HS

On March 6, Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Director Allan Bromley defended his office's FY 1992 budget before the House Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies appropriations subcommittee. The occasion allowed the chairman, Rep. Robert Traxler (D-MI) and other members of the subcommittee to explore science policy with Bromley, who also serves as the assistant to the president for science and technology.

In discussing the role of "big science" projects – including the superconducting supercollider, the human genome project, and the earth orbiting system – Bromley admitted that sometimes priority setting in science involves other factors besides science. He conceded that international and political considerations are often part of the process of science policymaking.

Population Research

Rep. Bill Green (R-NY), the ranking Republican on the subcommittee, noted his interest in research on world population and wanted to know where the Bush administration stood. Bromley agreed this should merit the attention of the science office. He suggested the need to disassociate fertility policy and population growth control from abortion arguments. He declared that the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology has expressed an interest in this topic. Bromley has asked OSTP's associate director for life sciences to explore the need for more research in this area.

There was considerable discussion about NASA's proposed revised plan for the space station. Traxler noted that the new scaled down version was "workable and affordable." A less costly space station might free up some dollars for NSF research, which is also funded by this subcommittee.

Traxler quoted former NSF Director Erich Bloch's comments that scientists "have no in-

alienable right to funding." Bromley suggested that recent remarks by scientists claiming "the sky is falling" were inappropriate. He seemed to agree that instead of emphasizing opportunities and achievements, scientists have developed "an element of entitlement" which is "not a wise approach." Despite these thoughts, Bromley and the members of the subcommittee agreed that the U.S. was underinvesting in research and development.

Pre-college Science Education

Bromley also decried the "scandalous" condition of U.S. pre-college science education and the problem of foreign Ph.D.s dominating American graduate education because American students do not choose science as a career. To bolster Bromley's last point, Traxler noted his daughter's junior high school science project, in which she surveyed teenagers on the development of self-esteem. One of the results of this behavioral science project indicated that 70 percent of the boys wanted to be professional athletes. (Now if only Bromley could sign a four-year \$21 million contract, then maybe we could solve the problem.)

Subcommittee members complained about NSF's focus on undergraduate and graduate education, leaving pre-college education to the Department of Education. Traxler announced that his subcommittee has no faith in the Education Department and said he intends to increase the role of NSF in pre-college education.

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Finally, Green asked Bromley to evaluate the relative importance of improving overall scientific literacy for the general public and the need to produce more professional scientists. Bromley agreed that the former was more important, but much more difficult since it required severe cultural changes.

National Science Foundation

Traxler's subcommittee also found time March 5 and 6 to scrutinize the FY 1992 request for the National Science Foundation. New NSF Director Walter Massey (confirmed by the Senate on February 28 and sworn in on March 4) led his troops to the hearing room. The subcommittee was generally pleased with the large (17.5 percent) increase for NSF and seems to think NSF does a great job. But given spending caps and the needs of the other agencies under its jurisdiction – including NASA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development – the panel is faced with a difficult set of decisions, Traxler said.

As usual, the subcommittee questioned the spending on the Science and Technology Centers (STC) and acted pleased to hear that the FY 1991 spending on these centers was reduced from the \$25 million request to \$15 million and that no new funding has been requested in the FY 1992 budget. Traxler said he does not want funding for the STCs to "rob from basic research grants" in a tight fiscal climate.

Rep. Chester Atkins (D-MA) expressed consternation about the zero request for the facilities modernization program and others asked targeted ques-

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tions about the proposed \$50 million research instrumentation program. Traxler asked how this new program differed from already existing instrumentation programs in the directorates. NSF's response seemed to suggest the new program will fund larger, more costly instruments.

Panel members also raised questions about the human dimensions of global change program within the social and economic science division of BBS. Assistant Director for BBS Mary Clutter and Deputy NSF Director Fred Bernthal noted the budget increase for research on the economics of global environmental change (an increase that grew out of last year's White House conference on global change). Traxler expressed interest in how this program relates to a NASA program called CIESIN and to other areas of global change research.

Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), a new member of the subcommittee, expressed her interest in behavioral and neural science research supported by NSF, especially as it relates to mental illness. She also indicated her concern with social science research on multinational corporations and transnational economic transactions.

SMOOTH SAILING FOR HEALY AT CONFIRMATION HEARING FOR NIH POST

"When she accepted her nomination, I told her that I would wholeheartedly support her or stridently oppose her, whichever she thought would help her most," said Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-OH), referring to Dr. Bernadine Healy, President Bush's nominee to head the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Metzenbaum introduced Healy at her March 14 confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources.

While praising Healy's qualifications, committee chairman Edward Kennedy (D-MA) expressed his concern that the process of selecting her had taken so long and that the administration had delayed the appointment while it applied a political "litmus test" to potential candidates. One test item, fetal tissue transplantation research, was surprisingly absent from the questions asked by the senators. The use of fetal tissue in biomedical research has been halted by the Administration over concerns within the anti-abortion rights community that the tissue is abstracted from aborted fetuses.

While Healy mentioned that she would uphold the research moratorium, no one pressed her on the subject (although Kennedy said he would submit a question to her for written response). The silence seemed to suggest a consensus that the controversy is better left unstirred now that a popular candidate has been nominated.

In their opening statements, most senators – Democrat and Republican alike – noted their support for Healy. Each also mentioned the significance of appointing a woman to head NIH now that Congress has intensified the institutes' mandate on women's health research. "In terms of her being the first woman appointed to such a high post, I say 'at last'!" commented Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), a major sponsor of women's health legislation. Healy noted more than once her commitment to the agenda, including research on older women's health, a particular concern of Sen. Brock Adams (D-WA), chairman of the Subcommittee on Aging.

Healy's Statement

In a lengthy and eloquent statement, Healy outlined major problem areas and priorities for NIH. One of these is the issue of the human talent base – the need to attract and maintain qualified scientific researchers. Healy noted that morale has become a problem among the scientific community, with increasing accusations of misconduct, conflict of interest, and internecine warfare among scientists. In fact, Healy quipped, "things are so bad, some have said, they couldn't even get a man to be director of NIH!"

Sens. Mikulski and Paul Wellstone (D-MN) asked Healy about the extent to which she thought NIH should be examining environmental correlates of health and disease. Healy remarked that as we have come to know a great deal more about the intrinsic factors – e.g., the genetic or cellular basis of disease – we can now better examine their interface with extrinsic, environmental factors. But she also cautioned about the difficulty in proving environmental causation of illness. She argued that policy issues should be put aside until we have perfected "risk assessment" methodologies that can better establish causation, and she advocated a focus on such methodologies at NIH.

Sen. David Durenberger (R-MN) voiced interest in Healy's response to the need for behavioral science approaches at NIH. "We can't come to grips with health problems in this country until we deal with the behavioral sciences," he asserted. Healy, assuming this was a statement rather than a question, responded only with a smile and a "thank you."

With overwhelming support from members of the Committee, it is fairly certain that Healy will be confirmed by the full Senate without any difficulty.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF HEALTH CITES BEHAVIOR AS FUTURE FOCUS OF PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

Assistant Secretary for Health James Mason appeared before a Senate appropriations panel on March 12 to defend the FY 1992 budget request of the Public Health Service (PHS). The \$15.6 billion request represents a 3.3 percent increase over FY 1991 levels.

Appearing before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health, Human Services, and Education, Mason outlined three themes that will dominate PHS activities in the next few years: 1) disease prevention and health promotion, with a special focus on reducing infant mortality; 2) the stabilization and enhancement of basic biomedical and behavioral research; and 3) combatting drug abuse by expanding research and treatment resources. Also in the works are new initiatives that target infant mortality, lead poisoning, and breast and cervical cancer.

Mason noted that PHS activities are being framed in the context of the "Healthy People 2000" report, a blueprint of national goals for health promotion and disease prevention issued by the Assistant Secretary's office last December.

In response to a question about prevention activities from subcommittee chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA), Mason mentioned that 33 percent of the FY 1992 request was for prevention research and services.

More Emphasis on Behavior

After thanking Mason for his work so far, Harkin asked if there was any longer-range plan - beyond the "Healthy People 2000" goals - for health promotion and disease prevention in the United States. Mason answered that the nation will need to move the focus of debate away from health funding: "More than resources, we're going to have to get down to behavior," he said.

Whether or not this comment translates into greater support for behavioral research in the Public Health Service remains to be seen.

WITH REPORT UNFINISHED, BBS TASK FORCE LOOKS TO FUTURE

The interim report of NSF's task force on "Looking to the Twenty First Century" was behind schedule last week when the panel's working group on social, economic, and psychological science (SEPS) met in San Francisco. The report was originally expected to be ready for the March 10 meeting, but with nothing in hand, the SEPS panel spent the day discussing issues unrelated to the question of creating a separate directorate.

Mary Clutter, assistant NSF director for the biological, behavioral and social sciences (BBS) directorate, began the meeting by announcing that Walter Massey, sworn in March 4 as NSF's new director, will meet with the NSF Executive Council on April 1 and 2. The council will discuss "NSF in the Year 2000," and Clutter said she will report on the progress of the BBS Task Force at this meeting, including the recommendation for a separate SEPS directorate.

Report Still Unfinished

Courtland Lewis, a professional science writer hired by Clutter, continues to draft the task force report. The original deadline for a final version was April 1, but the report is not expected then, either. Clutter said she hopes that with considerable input from task force chairman Pete Magee, dean of the College of Biological Sciences at the University of Minnesota, and other members of the panel, the report will be available in time for the early May meeting of the regular BBS Advisory Committee. Following its review by that committee, the report will be transmitted to Massey and the National Science Board.

The current draft of the report includes a recommendation to create another task force, this one to determine the structure of the SEPS directorate. Clutter suggested it might be two or three years before the SEPS directorate becomes a reality.

Among the issues discussed at the meeting was NSF's role vis-a-vis other federal agencies that support research. Richard Berk, a sociologist at the University of California – Los Angeles, argued that NSF should not worry about redundancy, noting the

need for "healthy chaos" in science. Charles Plott, an economist at the California Institute of Technology, pointed out that outside NSF, the federal government offers no support for long-term basic research in economics. Other federal agencies were not very good at articulating basic research needs in economics, according to Plott.

Pre-college Education

Panel members discussed at length the role of SEPS disciplines in pre-college education. A number of task force members noted the emphasis on social studies, rather than social science. Nancy Cantor, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, argued for the need to better connect basic research in psychology to the needs of the education and human resources directorate at NSF.

Peter Rogerson, a geographer at the State University of New York at Buffalo, described the impact of alliances for geographic education. Organized with support from the National Geographic Society, these alliances helped make geography a focus of elementary and secondary school curricula, he said. Working group chairman Magee wondered aloud how NSF could help infuse the K-12 curriculum with social, economic, and psychological science.

Concerning the way science exists in universities, Cantor pushed the concept of "institutes without walls," in which researchers from various campuses would be encouraged to cooperate on research projects, especially across disciplines.

Magee asked what SEPS would be willing to sacrifice in the current zero-sum funding atmosphere – equipment, conferences, post-docs? Plott responded, however, that most SEPS disciplines receive very little support for these areas and thus would have very little to give up. Berk argued the need to set priorities for what exists now. He advocated bigger grants for fewer folks, rather than small grants to many researchers.

Sunrise, Sunset

Discussion then turned to the possibility of "sunsetting" certain programs. Plott said it would be difficult to sunset, "since there had not been a sunrise." This "Fiddler on the Roof" discussion continued with Berk arguing that given the paucity of funds, NSF should get out of the database business. NSF has for many years supported three major social science data bases – the National

Election Studies, the General Social Survey, and the Panel Study on Income Dynamics. Berk said the need for trade-offs necessitated the phasing out of what he termed the "lowest denominator research" represented by the data bases. He argued that NSF should be at the cutting edge of research taking risks and maintained that support for the databases did not fit this definition of NSF's role.

Plott came to the defense of the databases, particularly the National Election Studies. This database, he contended, has had an important impact on political science. He also stated that reviews of these databases should include the user population.

U.S. Graduate Students

The panel also discussed the relatively low number of American students in U.S. graduate programs. Most of the working group members felt this trend was more prevalent in the natural and physical sciences than in SEPS disciplines. They argued for encouraging cross-national research and collaboration with social and behavioral scientists from other countries. Cantor noted that the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan had helped establish an ISR-type operation in Warsaw, Poland.

Clutter announced that the bilateral science agreement with the Soviet Union will soon include eligibility for social and behavioral scientists to develop NSF supported research with their counterparts in the USSR. Plott suggested that the variety of natural experiments going on in the world can provide great opportunities for research by social and behavioral scientists.

The session ended with participants identifying exciting areas of research in the next 10 years. The resulting list clearly reflected the disciplinary backgrounds and research interests of the working group members. The list included the impact of "stop and go" rules for behavior (Cantor), the effect of global perspectives and geographic information systems on global change (Rogerson), the creation of new political and economic decision processes (Plott), the cross-modal representation of information and the unified approaches to cognition (Steve Anderson, a linguist at Johns Hopkins) and the intersections of human, physical, and biological processes and their impact on sustainable development (Berk).

The Task Force may meet again to discuss the report upon its completion.

MOYNIHAN HEARING EXAMINES SOCIAL INDICATORS TO MEASURE CHILD WELL-BEING

"Twenty-three percent of children born in 1979-80 received welfare under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program during their childhoods," according to Jo Anne Barnhart, Health and Human Services assistant secretary for family support. At a March 4 hearing, the Senate Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy focused on child well-being and dependency, and Barnhart's statistic resonated with committee chair Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), who repeated the figure many times with incredulity.

Alarmed by the fact that most poor Americans are children, Moynihan called a two-day hearing to examine the possibility of developing a system of social indicators to measure childhood well-being and dependency in post-industrial society. Witnesses at the March 4 session described existing federal data on child dependency at the Department of Health and Human Services, the Bureau of the Census, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The consensus of these witnesses was that, while the United States has gathered good information about dependency at one point in time, more longitudinal data - such as those gathered in the Survey of Income and Program Participation - are necessary for an accurate picture of the dynamics of moving in and out of dependency over time.

Consolidated Data

The witnesses agreed that disparate data collection efforts should be consolidated into a measurement system, like the leading economic indicators, to help assess national progress on reducing welfare dependency. But noting that economic indicators are usually presented in charts with no narrative, Janet Norwood, commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, insisted that "social indicators are useful only when they are accompanied by analysis and interpretation." She conveyed to the subcommittee her hope that any legislation intending to develop such indicators require an analytic report to accompany the resulting data.

Paul Barton of the Educational Testing Service pointed out that a body of social science literature interpreting social indicators has existed for some time, beginning with Durkheim's analysis of the relationship between suicide and the business cycle. On March 8, the committee held the second part of its hearing and heard from representatives of non-governmental organizations that conduct research on child and family well-being. Douglas Besharov of the American Enterprise Institute described efforts underway by researchers in New York and Illinois to combine data from existing, but disparate, sources on foster care and mental health placement to begin to develop a more comprehensive picture of the outcomes of dependency. Besharov suggested that more data would be collected by the states if they were reimbursed by the federal government for the outcomes instead of the expenditures of social programs.

Broad Measure for Outcomes

Judith Jones of the National Center for Children in Poverty noted that even Moynihan's Family Support Act of 1988 (the welfare reform bill) does not require states to provide outcome reports. The legislation should include such a requirement, she said. Furthermore, Jones argued, outcome should not be assessed by a single measure – getting off welfare – but should include a broad range of measures, including ability to earn above-poverty income, job placement success, and educational attainment. Jones also reminded the committee that policies and programs should recognize that "children are not poor, their parents are," and should therefore take a two-generational approach.

Once social indicators are in place, the question becomes what to do with them, noted William Gorham, president of the Urban Institute. Arguing that social indicators are markers, not evaluative tools, he suggested that in order to understand what steps communities and parents can take to produce better outcomes, policymakers need more longitudinal, behavioral research. For this, he said, the United States needs to provide better institutional support for social and behavioral scientists, a challenge Gorham directed Moynihan to take on.

One realm of social and behavioral research essential to understanding and addressing child dependency and poverty across generations is child development, said Randall Olson of the Center for Human Resources at Ohio State. Olson congratulated the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics for supporting research on children's home environments but argued for the need to better identify the factors that have the greatest impact on child development.

When Moynihan noted that he'd never heard of the NICHD research, Olson responded, "It's very powerful data." Quipped Moynihan, "If the Committee on Finance hasn't heard of it, it's only semipowerful data!"

This exchange illustrated the problem of coordination and dissemination of federal data on children and families, one of the topics addressed by the subcommittee hearings and undoubtedly to be pursued. Efforts underway among a number of organizations, including COSSA, to improve the status of family-related data were mentioned at the hearing and duly noted by the subcommittee.

NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY FORUM CONTINUES LOOK AT FAMILY WELL-BEING

American families with children are in economic trouble, according to participants in the February 25 meeting of the George Washington University National Health Policy Forum. The meeting was the second in a two-part series on family wellbeing (see UPDATE, January 28, 1991).

Statistics gathered by the House Ways and Means Committee indicate that changes in tax and transfer policies over the past decade – e.g., the lowering of income tax rates for top earners and the tightening of eligibility for AFDC and Medicaid – account for about one-third of the decline in disposable income among families with children. Wendell Primus, chief economist for the House Ways and Means Committee, outlined the committee's data.

Similar data compiled and presented by Isabel Sawhill, senior fellow at the Urban Institute and a member of the COSSA Board of Directors, indicate that changes in tax and transfer policies account for closer to 25 percent of the decline. Either way, both sets of data illustrate the extent to which more restrictive welfare polices and more regressive tax policies contribute to widening income inequality among American families.

Furthermore, preliminary data presented by Timothy Smeeding, professor of economics and public administration at Syracuse University, suggest that the United States ranks worst among eight Western nations in its rate of child poverty as affected by changing tax and transfer policies between 1979 and 1986.

The data presented by Primus, Sawhill, and Smeeding were discussed by Lawrence Mead, author of "Beyond Entitlement" and a political scientist at New York University. Mead argued that the focus of changes in family well-being ought to be on employment rather than on income. Income inequality, he argued, stems from the fact that families at the top of the income distribution are working more than families at the bottom.

Poverty is fundamentally a question of employment, Mead said, and what has changed is the declining level of "work effort" (usually measured by hours worked) among the poor. The reason for this apparent decline in work commitment is a mystery, Mead conceded, but the problem must be seen as a social and behavioral issue, not an economic one.

Some members of the audience cautioned Mead about the "blaming the victim" aspect of his culture of poverty argument. They argued instead for a renewed focus on social-structural forces that produce a decline in meaningful work options for the poor.

SOURCES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT: NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

COSSA provides this information as a service and encourages readers to contact the agency for further information or application materials. Additional guidelines and restrictions may apply.

Division of Research Grants

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) is offering small grants to support doctoral dissertation research by underrepresented minorities. Grant support is designed to aid the research of new minority investigators and to encourage individuals from a variety of academic disciplines and programs to study problems in aging. Specific research topics should be discussed with NIA.

Eligible Applicants: Applicants for a dissertation research grant must be individuals from an

underrepresented minority group enrolled in an accredited doctoral degree program in biomedical, social, or behavioral sciences. They must also have approval of the dissertation proposal by a named committee. The student must be conducting or intending to conduct dissertation research on issues related to

aging.

Restrictions on Awards: The total direct costs of the entire project may not exceed \$25,000. Allowable

costs include the investigator's salary (not to exceed \$10,000); direct research project expenses such as travel, data processing, and supplies; and dissertation

costs. No tuition nor permanent equipment is allowed.

Review Process: Dissertation research grants are competitive. A mail review will conducted.

Review results and funding decisions will be announced within 5 months after the submission date. Final funding decisions are based on the recommendations of the reviewers, the relevance of the project to NIA priorities, and the availability of

funds.

Deadline: April 29, 1991

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