

APPROPRIATIONS SPUTTER TOWARD COMPLETION

Three weeks into Fiscal Year 2001 and eighteen days before the election, President Clinton and the Republican-controlled Congress continue their annual end-of-session battle over spending priorities. With a fourth Continuing Resolution (CR) in place until October 23 to keep the government open, weeks of non-stop negotiations have brought some progress. Ten of the thirteen bills are now completed, including VA-HUD, which includes funding for the National Science Foundation, and the Agriculture and Rural Development spending bill (see below).

Three bills remain undone. The huge Labor-Health and Human Services-Education appropriation remains stalled over the President's education priorities. The Republicans want to give the states and local school districts flexibility over how to spend federal funds; the President wants them targeted to reducing class size, hiring more teachers and modernizing school buildings. The \$2.7 billion increase for the National Institutes of Health is a non-controversial provision of this bill.

The Commerce-State-Justice bill, which includes funding for the Census Bureau, the National Institute of Justice, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the State Department's educational and cultural exchange programs, including Fulbright, is mired over immigration measures and an attempt to attach land conservation programs to the legislation. The Foreign Operations appropriation is stuck over the annual battle to bar funding to international organizations that advocate abortion rights.

As both sides seek an end to the gridlock and a chance to close out the 106th Congress, the hope is that adjournment can occur without resort to a fifth CR. Don't bet on it.

NSF GETS LARGEST INCREASE EVER

Congress has provided the National Science Foundation (NSF) its largest dollar increase in its history. The boost of \$529 million (13.6 percent) over FY 2000 brings the Foundation's appropriated funding for FY 2001 to \$4.426 billion.

The Research and Related Activities account grew to \$3.35 billion, close to a 13 percent increase above last year. Included in the conference report accompanying the final bill is language urging the Social, Behavioral and Economic Science Directorate to spend \$5 million "to initiate a separately competed Children's Research Initiative."

The report acknowledges that NSF funds research to provide "a better understanding of children," yet the conferees felt a "distinct program" was necessary to implement the recommendations of the 1997 National Science and Technology Council's report *Investing in Our Future: A National Research Initiative for America's Children in the 21st Century*. The Congress tells NSF to award "no less than three center awards with this first-year funding." It also notes that "highest funding priority should be given to proposals from distinct human sciences units in institutions of higher learning" (read: colleges of Human Ecology) "that have an interdisciplinary academic program in human and family development, nutrition, and related areas." Finally, the conferees declare that "a strong emphasis should also be placed on pursuing theory-driven, applied policy-related research on children, learning and the influence of families and communities on child development."

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The Education and Human Resource Directorate received \$787.4 million, a 14 percent increase over last year. The Graduate Research Fellows program will get a boost to \$55.2 million, with stipends increasing to \$18,000.

In the same bill, Congress appropriated \$53.5 million for FY 2001 to the Housing and Urban Development Department's Office of Policy Development and Research. This is an \$8.5 million boost above last year.

Agriculture Funding for FY 2001

The FY 2001 Agriculture and Rural Development appropriations bill again demonstrated that appropriators like their prerogative to designate how and where federal funds will be spent.

The appropriators included \$85.7 million for Special Grants for specific purposes in specific places. This is a large increase from last year's \$73.8 million for these grants. By contrast, the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants program received \$106 million, a decrease of \$13 million from last year's funding and \$44 million below the President's request.

The Hatch Act received steady funding for another year at \$180.5 million. The Economic Research Service ended up with a little over \$67 million. Of that total, \$12 million is for evaluation studies on food assistance programs. The National Agricultural Statistics Service received \$100.8

million, a slight increase over last year, with \$15 million designated for the Census of Agriculture.

NIH AND NSF GRANTS SUPPORTED THE 2000 NOBEL PRIZEWINNERS IN ECONOMICS

On October 11, 2000, two American economists, James J. Heckman of the University of Chicago, and Daniel L. McFadden of the University of California, Berkeley, were awarded the Nobel prize in Economics. Heckman and McFadden received the coveted prize for their work in micro-econometrics, which is widely applied in the analysis of individual and household behavior in economics and other social sciences.

Principal Deputy Director Ruth Kirchstein of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) expressed her satisfaction that the "two longtime NIH grantee scientists have made such significant advances in the social sciences." Noting that most of the 100 Nobel Laureates who have been funded by NIH to advance scientific knowledge won their prizes in physiology, medicine, or chemistry, Kirchstein expressed her delight "to see that honor has been extended to NIH-supported work in economics."

"Theoretical and methodological advances in economics are becoming increasingly valuable in a wide range of areas in health research. It is gratifying to see two economists whose work has been supported by NIH receive this recognition," said newly appointed Director Raynard Kington of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research. I hope that this will provide an even greater incentive to economists as well as scientists from other social science disciplines to think about how their disciplines can be applied to help us study and ultimately improve the health of all people, and I hope this will also encourage more social scientists to apply to NIH for funding support."

Heckman and McFadden are also current grantees of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Economics Program, and Heckman also receives support from the agency's Methodology, Measurement and Statistics Program. Both have been supported by the NSF "nearly continuously since the 1970s," explained NSF Director Rita Colwell. "This is always exciting news for

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scientists,” Colwell continued, “because we know what led up to this milestone — the long hours, hard work, and simple love of science. It’s especially exciting for the National Science Foundation because we so often play a significant role in the Nobelists’ careers.”

Heckman’s recognition stems from his pioneering work in accounting for unknown factors affecting statistical samples. Much of this work has been applied to understanding how early life events contribute to individuals’ later earnings potential and economic standing. Specifically, his work has provided researchers with the methods to determine the effects of poverty and other environmental factors on the life choices individuals make.

According to National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Director Duane Alexander, Heckman’s “microeconomic models have provided the standard for researchers the world over . . . His research also points to the critical nature of the first five years of life as predictive of such later life events as dropping out of high school, teenage pregnancy and early divorce.” Heckman is currently funded by the NICHD to examine the implications of earning a high school equivalency diploma, or G.E.D., for an individual’s later economic prospects.

McFadden earned the honor for his work involving a new theory of “discrete choice,” a way to measure how an individual’s decisions regarding occupation or housing, for example, reflect choices among a limited number of alternatives. According to the head of the Behavioral and Social Research Program, Richard Suzman at the National Institute on Aging (NIA), “application of these theories has broad implications for understanding the economics and other social behavior of individuals approaching and in retirement.”

McFadden, who has received support for his work from NIA since 1986, has performed significant work related to understanding economic behavior and its consequences. This includes:

- Extensive methodological work on the measurement of wealth of the elderly.
- Development of methods to determine the effects of a declining birth rate and aging population on the housing market. McFadden’s work is part of a

larger project on the economics of aging, led by David Wise of Harvard and the National Bureau for Economic Research (NBER). This work showed that the large gains of the housing market in the 1960s and 1970s will not extend to the baby boomer generation and that changes in this market could have a detrimental effect on the wealth and well-being of future elderly.

- Study of the relationship between how long a person expects to live and how much they save. This work, with Michael Hurd of The RAND Corp. and NBER, will allow scientists to better understand how people use subjective information in making choices. This research involves the use of the NIA-sponsored Health and Retirement Study, the largest survey to date looking at the health and well-being of people as they age.

NIH-WIDE HEALTH DISPARITIES PLAN RELEASED FOR COMMENT

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently released its draft five-year trans-NIH strategic research plan on health disparities, *NIH Strategic Research Plan to Reduce and Ultimately Eliminate Health Disparities*. The Plan, developed by a trans-NIH working group co-chaired by NIH Acting Deputy Director Yvonne Maddox and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci, describes the activities underway and plans to “bring the full strength of NIH’s research and training programs to bear on the challenge of eliminating domestic health disparities.” (See *UPDATE*, August 7, 2000).

NIH welcomes comments and suggestions on the draft plan through December 1, 2000

“Our aim at the NIH is to promote the development and transfer of research-based information from biomedical, behavioral, and social sciences for use by health professionals, communities, and others working toward the elimination of health disparities,” notes Principal Deputy Director Ruth Kirchstein and Office of Research on Minority Health Director John Ruffin.

The Plan draws on the health disparities plans of the NIH Institutes and Centers and relevant offices within the Office of the Director, including the

Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR). The Plan emphasizes that health disparities are "believed to be the result of the complex interaction among biological factors, the environment, and specific health behaviors. Inequalities in income and education also appear to underlie many health disparities in the United States. Disparities in income and education levels are associated with differences in the occurrence of illness and death, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, elevated blood lead level, and low birth weight."

The NIH plan focuses on three areas: research, research infrastructure, and public information and community outreach. The agency is focusing its initial attention on the health status and socioeconomic factors of specific racial and ethnic minority populations. According to the Plan, research efforts will be directed to the role of the environment and socioeconomic status (SES) in health disparities. New or improved approaches to preventing or delaying the onset or progression of disease and disabilities in minority populations will be explored as they relate to diseases such as diabetes, obesity, dental caries, asthma and HIV vaccine development, among others.

The following is a sample of social and behavioral science research directives included in the Plan:

Sexual Behaviors: A proposal to expand the understanding of factors that contribute to high-risk sexual behaviors is included in the Plan. Part of the study will measure the magnitude of risk reduction in the context of monthly support groups.

Youth Violence: The NIH Youth Violence Consortium will develop a collaborative effort to understand the antecedents, social and neurobiological causes, and outcomes of violent youth behavior. The agency will also support a collaborative effort across racial and ethnic lines to study the short- and long-term effects of domestic violence during pregnancy and the effects of domestic and community violence on children.

Environment and Socioeconomic Status: The NIH Plan acknowledges that research seeking to better understand the effects of social and physical environments on human health and disease is an

important contribution towards ameliorating the health disparities suffered by the economically disadvantaged. NIH expects that the Science and Ecology of Early Development Project, which examines the relationship of poverty to other factors that affect the development of children, will be extended.

Cognitive: The NIH will coordinate demographic and epidemiological studies on the racial, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, educational, and health factors affecting cognitive, sensory, and motor health and the development of mild cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disease of aging.

Language Disorders: The Plan notes that as the United States becomes more culturally, racially and linguistically diverse, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discriminate between language disorders and languages differences in children. The NIH is supporting research to develop language tests for non-standard English.

Mental Health: NIH will support research to determine why recruitment and retention of minority group members in clinical trials of mental health treatments is so difficult; to determine the most culturally relevant, appropriate, and acceptable outcomes regarding symptoms and functioning; to see if there are different outcomes for minority groups when treatment interventions are provided in the community and if so, why; to determine whether providers use different interventions for various minority groups and if so, why; and to determine the impact of cultural competence training on the quality of care and treatment outcome for minority patients.

The Plan can be found on the NIH website:
www.nih.gov/about/hd/strategicplan.pdf

PRISONER REENTRY GAINS ATTENTION OF RESEARCHERS, GOVERNMENT

Nearly 600,000 inmates are to be released from prison and returned to communities in the year 2000. This sounds like a large figure, and it is — more prisoners are returning to communities now than at any point in U.S. history. Prisoner reentry was the subject of a roundtable that attracted many

of the top criminal justice researchers and professionals to Washington, D.C. on October 12th and 13th.

A Timely Topic

Sponsored by the Urban Institute, the Roundtable provided a forum for sharing the latest research and observations on prisoner reentry. With unprecedented numbers of inmates leaving prison and returning to communities, the quality (or lack thereof) of strategies for successful reentry can have far-reaching implications.

Participants voiced concern over the current situation. Not only is the number of releasees high, but their needs appear more serious than in the past and there are few treatment and work programs to assist in their transition, according to Joan Petersilia, Professor of Criminology, Law, and Society at the University of California, Irvine. Furthermore, the rise in mandatory sentencing laws means that fewer inmates are being screened for risk prior to leaving prison, compromising the ability to retain inmates that appear ill-prepared for release.

The recent trend towards mandatory sentencing is a reaction to the previous discretionary system in which offenders' socioeconomic characteristics often influenced their chances of being granted parole. However, the current system (in place in 14 states) of determinate sentencing and automatic release throws "the baby out with the bathwater," according to Sam Myers of The University of Minnesota. Many researchers believe some degree of discretion in the system is important.

Those that are released, Petersilia continued, have limited access to rehabilitation programs that can make their transition to the outside community more successful and reduce their chances of being rearrested. Currently, fully two-thirds of parolees are rearrested within three years, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Increased funding, Petersilia noted, often goes to prison-building programs and not to the rehabilitation programs that might reduce future inmate populations.

The problem of prisoner reentry received top-level attention in President Clinton's FY 2001 budget, which included \$145 million to develop and implement reentry programs.

The Offender's Experience

The Roundtable's keynote speech was presented by *New York Times* correspondent Fox Butterfield, who described his conversations with offenders who had been through California's prison system. Butterfield's speech brought to life some of the issues that researchers had discussed earlier in the day.

For instance, the experiences of Butterfield's subjects confirmed and humanized the researchers' observations of the inadequacy of post-release services. His subjects had difficulty adapting to life outside of prison. They not only found assistance hard to come by, but felt that the system was designed to return them to prison rather than facilitate their transition. The frustration of the offenders interviewed by Butterfield led many of them to remark that the system set them up to fail. One offender joked that parole officers get a bounty for each parolee returned to jail.

Butterfield found that parolees did return to jail frequently. The result was that offenders were often incarcerated for much longer than their sentence demanded. Technical violations of parole sent them back to prison multiple times, extending their sentences indefinitely. Butterfield described this as incarceration without trial. If the point is to get criminals off the street, he remarked, there are better ways.

Towards Progress in Prisoner Reentry

Despite the problems in the criminal justice system described by some of the Roundtable participants, most had ideas for future research and for more effective programs to facilitate the ex-offender's successful reentry into society.

One broad goal is to move towards a more holistic or systems-view approach to criminal justice and prisoner reentry. Currently, observed Petersilia, the offender is the unit of analysis. The ties between the offender and other parts of society and the criminal justice system are often overlooked.

Another broad goal emphasized at the Roundtable is to learn more about the successes — those inmates who made the transition to society successfully and those programs that research has shown to reduce recidivism. We know much about

the failures, observed Martin Horn, Commissioner of Corrections for the State of Pennsylvania, but little about the successes. Horn has found that sobriety, education and work are three important aspects of successful reentry.

Other recommendations included increasing post-release services, focusing on the social networks that reduce crime, linking state-level administrative data, creating partnerships with the community and private organizations and thinking at smaller geographic scales.

One of the main themes of the Reentry Roundtable appeared to be that more research needs to be conducted on the subject. Despite the need for more study, there is much that the Roundtable participants and others in the criminal justice community do know about reentry, and there is considerable opportunity to apply this knowledge to public policy to improve the lives of ex-offenders and the residents of the communities to which they return.

COSSA SEMINAR EXAMINES NEIGHBORHOOD EFFECTS

On September 25, 2000, COSSA held its third and final congressional briefing of the year, *How Neighborhoods Matter: The Value of Investing at the Local Level*. The American Sociological Association co-sponsored the briefing. Three distinguished social scientists shared their research findings about neighborhoods and how and why neighborhoods matter beyond the individual attributes of the people who live there.

The briefing addressed such questions as how neighborhood conditions are intertwined in producing health-related risks, how neighborhoods connect to different patterns of school achievement in children and youth, and how discrimination affects the quality of life and even the costs of living in neighborhoods.

Troy Duster, Chancellor's Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley and Professor of Sociology at New York University moderated the briefing. He began by asking the standing-room-only crowd (that included Federal agency officials and congressional staffers), What is

the connection between neighborhoods and well-being?

"We all grew up in neighborhoods; they are the social context in which we frame our lives," explained Duster. However, neighborhoods are a difficult topic to study, he emphasized. What is needed are new strategies for studying the effects of neighborhoods — in particular, those that do not treat "social context" as a trait.

Neighborhoods and Health Consequences

Robert J. Sampson, Lucy Flower Professor in Sociology at the University of Chicago and Senior Research Fellow at the American Bar Foundation, addressed questions of how neighborhood conditions are intertwined in producing health-related risks. Sampson began by emphasizing that social characteristics vary widely and systematically across neighborhoods, especially along dimensions of socio-economic status (e.g., poverty, affluence), family structure (e.g., female-headed households), residential stability (e.g., home ownership and tenure) and racial/ethnic composition (e.g., racial segregation).

Research has long linked neighborhood characteristics with variations in mortality, general physical health, and psychological well-being even after individual attributes and risky behaviors are taken into consideration. Despite this research, Sampson emphasized that we know little regarding the common underlying factors behind the findings because of the paucity of data. Past research has been limited to census data — we need to move beyond that, he said.

Sampson also highlighted that experimental research has demonstrated neighborhood connections to violence and a number of health outcomes. Concentrated disadvantage is a predictor of lower levels of neighborhood social control and cohesion. It appears to influence violence and other high-risk outcome *in part* by diminishing the collective efficacy of residents in achieving neighborhood social control.

Research also reveals important spatial dynamics at work that go well beyond the geographic borders of neighborhoods, noted Sampson. Spatial proximity to neighborhoods high

in violence is one of the strongest predictors of homicide in any given neighborhood, regardless of its own economic resources and social composition.

Neighborhoods and Education

Min Zhou, Professor of Sociology and Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, discussed the significance of community for the education of immigrant children. Zhou noted that more than half of the metropolitan population are either first generation immigrants or U.S. born children of immigrants, compared to 20 percent of the total U.S. population. She added that more than half of second generation immigrants are under 15 years of age.

Zhou emphasized that residents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to be: 1) socially isolated from mainstream American society with little contact with whites or the middle class; 2) culturally exposed either to native-born minority culture that is often oppositional to the mainstream, or to immigrant cultures from which children often try hard to distance themselves, or to a materialistic mainstream culture that is over-dramatized through television; 3) devastated by poverty, substandard living conditions, unsafe streets, and economic distress; and 4) handicapped by inadequate and turbulent schools exhibiting low achievement, high dropout rates, high rates of below-grade level enrollment, overcrowding, violence, and problems with English.

Migration, noted Zhou, disrupts the normal patterns of social relations and interpersonal interaction between family members and people in the community and undermines the customary agents of social control. Immigrant parents often work several jobs on different shifts in order to meet their needs, she explained, and the result is often that children are undersupervised. Children who actively participate in supervised after-school activities tend to do well in school regardless of race or ethnicity, said Zhou.

She further noted that the density of commercial activities enhances neighborhood conditions for investment in other types of enterprises, including those that are educationally-oriented. The density of commercial and social activities encourages people to go out on the street, thereby increasing interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, the diversity

and density of ethnic businesses creates job opportunities and role models, attracts the middle-class to return for shopping and cultural activities, and cultivates social ties between the inner-city poor and their middle-class coethnics, which to some extent offsets the negative effects of isolation.

Neighborhoods and Discrimination

Gregory D. Squires, Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Department of Sociology at George Washington University, echoed his colleagues in discussing how discrimination affects the quality of life and even the costs of living in neighborhoods. Squires argued that racial segregation, concentrated poverty, and urban sprawl are all pieces of a debilitating process of uneven development that has long plagued metropolitan areas. Racial segregation is taken for granted as a feature of city life in the U.S. today, said Squires. He further noted that closely linked to the processes of segregation are the concentration of poverty within cities and urban sprawl. Neighborhoods throughout metropolitan areas, he added, are paying the costs of racial segregation and uneven development.

Perhaps most interesting was Squires' explanation for the urban problems of racial segregation, concentrated poverty, and urban sprawl. Conventional wisdom, he said, suggests that the problems confronting urban neighborhoods generally and racial minorities, in particular, stem primarily from cultural attributes, skill deficiencies, different value systems or other individual characteristics.

This is not so, Squires contends. Public policies, past and present, are more significant in creating and perpetuating racial segregation, he said. These policies include racially restrictive covenants, local exclusionary zoning ordinances that restrict affordable housing, concentrating public housing in central city neighborhoods, FHA insurance practices that have long favored predominantly white suburban communities, and federal highway construction and urban renewal programs that destroy many predominantly non-white inner city neighborhoods to facilitate commuter access to the suburban ring.

A transcript of the briefing's proceedings will be available in December.

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CONTRIBUTORS

American Council of Learned Societies
American Institutes for Research
University of Arizona
Bowling Green State University
Brookings Institution
Brown University
University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Davis
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, San Diego
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Consortium of Social Science Associations

1522 K Street, N.W., Suite 836, Washington, D.C. 20005
