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HAPPY NEW YEAR! CONGRESS RETURNS AND BEGINS TO ORGANIZE THE 109TH

The 109th Congress assembled in Washington on January 4th and began the process of selecting committee leaders and members as they get ready to tackle President Bush's ambitious second-term agenda.

The caucus-wide leadership positions in the two chambers were settled in December. Continuity reigned in both the House and Senate Republican ranks, with Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL), Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX), Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-MO), Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN), and Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-KY) remaining in power. On the Democratic side, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) will continue to lead their colleagues in the House. On the Senate side, Harry Reid (D-NV) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) represent a new leadership team necessitated by the defeat of former Democratic leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) in November.

Lewis Wins Nod to Lead House Spending Panel

The key decision last week was the selection of Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA) as the new chair of House Appropriations Committee. Lewis won the votes of GOP Steering Committee members over the two other contenders for the position, Rep. Ralph Regula (R-OH) and Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY). Regula will continue to head the Labor, HHS

(Continued on Next Page)

NATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE COMMISSION EXAMINES 2004 VOTE

On December 22, a working group of the Social Science Research Council's (SSRC) National Research Commission on Elections and Voting issued an interim report examining alleged problems with the 2004 U.S. presidential election. It found "no current evidence of irregularities of sufficient magnitude or scope to change the popular vote or Electoral College winner."

The SSRC-sponsored commission is a non-partisan, independent initiative intended to bring scholarly research, knowledge and perspective to bear on improving the integrity of the electoral process. SSRC established the commission on October 27. Alexander

(Continued on Next Page)

Inside UPDATE...

- NSF ANNOUNCES COMPETITION FOR AMERICAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS STUDIES
- REPORT ON FIREARMS AND VIOLENCE RELEASED
- BROOKINGS CENTER RELEASES ANNUAL REPORT ON EDUCATION
- REPORT EXAMINES RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING
- NIDA AND MICHIGAN RELEASE REPORT ON TEEN DRUG USE
- DEMOGRAPHY CENTERS ESTABLISHED BY NIH



CONGRESS, (Continued from Page 1)

and Education spending panel and Rogers will maintain his chairmanship of the Homeland Security Subcommittee.

Lewis, who chaired the Defense Appropriations subcommittee for the past six years, has promised to help the leadership and the Administration in its goal to reduce the deficit through restrained spending, particularly on domestic programs. Lewis also previously chaired the VA, HUD, Independent Agencies Subcommittee, with jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation (NSF). He has announced that Frank Cushing, who worked on the staff of that subcommittee, will be returning to become the staff director of the full appropriations committee.

The new House spending committee chair has also announced that he will work with the newly-appointed Senate Appropriations Committee Chair, Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS), about both potential changes in the subcommittee jurisdictions and the possible elimination of some panels altogether. In December, DeLay had circulated a plan to shake up the Appropriations committee by reducing the number of subcommittees from 13 to 10 and shifting jurisdictions, including a possible panel that would handle all science-related agencies. However, the possible changes under discussion between the new chairmen are believed to be less drastic than those proposed by DeLay.

Hastert, along with Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, also discreetly shuffled the sizes of 11 House committees last week and made appointments to the most “exclusive” committees – Appropriations, Ways and Means, Rules, and Energy and Commerce. In addition, Representative Collin Peterson (D-MN) was appointed the ranking Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee and Representative Bennie Thompson (D-MS) became the top Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee, which now has permanent committee status in the 109th Congress.

New Cabinet Nominees Scrutinized in the Senate

Congress also spent its first week back conducting a series of confirmation hearings for second-term Cabinet appointees. Attorney General designate Alberto Gonzales received the most rigorous examination and press attention. On the other hand, Margaret Spellings, nominated to take over the Education Department, faced a fairly friendly Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, with its new Chairman Mike Enzi (R-WY). Despite misgivings by some Senators over

extending National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) tests to all high school students, Spellings, a former White House and Texas education policy adviser to Bush, won the unanimous support of the Committee and should handily win confirmation from the full Senate. The same can be said for the Agriculture Department nominee, Governor Mike Johanns of Nebraska, who survived his hearing with the Senate Agriculture Committee, chaired by Cochran. In addition, Carlos Gutierrez won the support of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, chaired by Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), to become the new Secretary of Commerce.

2004 VOTE (Continued from Page 1)

Keyssar, Professor of History and Social Policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, serves as Chair. Other key findings of the working group included:

- 1) Discrepancies between early exit poll results and popular vote tallies in several states may be due to a variety of factors, and do not constitute *prima facie* evidence for fraud in the election;
- 2) Recent studies noting disparities between county registration rates and voting outcomes in Florida, as well as apparent “machine effects” favoring George W. Bush, are of limited significance and cannot be considered as evidence of election fraud;
- 3) Ohio witnessed significant variability in wait times in some districts, sporadic machine malfunctions, and possible voting tabulation errors, undercounts, and overcounts. However, based on the data currently available, it is extremely unlikely that the absence of these irregularities would have shifted popular vote tallies sufficiently to change the declared winner in Ohio. However, continuing uncertainty over the extent of irregularities merits closer public scrutiny and full disclosure of further relevant data;
- 4) It may be impossible to achieve a definitive resolution for some allegations of malfeasance or irregularities in the 2004 presidential election, due to inadequate data and insufficient transparency of the election administration process in many states;
- 5) Full and transparent collection and public disclosure of electoral process data are vital in order to restore public credibility in our election system, and to ensure the effective resolution of electoral process controversies in future elections.

Members of the working group were: Henry Brady, University of California, Berkeley; Guy-Uriel Charles, University of Minnesota; Benjamin Highton, University of California, Davis; Martha Kropf, University of Missouri, Kansas City; Walter Mebane Jr., Cornell University; and Michael Traugott, University of Michigan.

A final report is expected in early 2005. More information about the Commission can be found at <http://election04.ssrc.org>.

NSF ANNOUNCES COMPETITION FOR AMERICAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS STUDIES

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced that it is re-competing the American National Election Studies (ANES). **Full proposals are due May 6, 2005.** The Foundation expects to make an award of \$7.6 million for four years starting in January 2006.

The ANES is an important, large-scale, data-collection project on election campaigns, electoral choice, election outcomes, and citizen engagement in the United States. The study began at the University of Michigan, where data from the surveys for all thirteen presidential and midterm elections between 1952 and 1976 is available at the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Since 1977, the NSF has supported the effort, still housed at the University of Michigan, but directed by a Board of Overseers from across the nation. In recent years, the surveys have been conducted in presidential election years only and the data from these are also available through ICPSR (www.icpsr.umich.edu).

The proclaimed mission of the ANES is to produce high-quality data on voting, public opinion, and political participation that serve the research needs of social scientists, teachers, students, policy makers, and journalists concerned with the theoretical and empirical foundations of mass politics in a democratic society. Central to this mission is the active involvement of the ANES research community in all phases of the project, from study planning through data analysis.

The elements of the re-competed ANES will include: support for a presidential study that includes a core component; consideration of a panel design for the presidential election study; face-to-face interviewing of respondents for the core component;

pilot research on innovative methodologies and substantive issues; consideration of a dynamic component that captures ongoing events of political importance; use of the core study as a “docking station” for substantive modules submitted by researchers; cooperative agreements with funding groups, other government agencies, surveys and the like; and the maintenance of standards for access and dissemination.

For further information, prospective applicants are encouraged to visit the online version of the report of a 2003 workshop on American Electoral Behavior: <http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/sbs/polisci/aeb/start.htm>

Contacts for more details about the competition: Jim Granato or Frank Scioli, NSF Political Science program officers: jgranato@nsf.gov or fscioli@nsf.gov; Phone: 703/292-7284.

REPORT ON FIREARMS AND VIOLENCE RELEASED

On December 16, the National Academies’ National Research Council (NRC) released its report, *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*. Charles Wellford, Professor of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of Maryland and a former COSSA Board Member, chaired the committee that produced the report.

Like many academy reports, this one also noted that the topic needed more study, particularly data collection and research that would provide answers to causality questions. The report concluded: “One theme that runs throughout our report is the relative absence of credible data central to addressing even the most basic questions about firearms and violence.”

The committee also maintains: “While there is a large body of empirical research on firearms and violence, there is little consensus on even the basic facts about these important policy issues.” Indicating that there is a wealth of descriptive information about the prevalence of firearm-related injuries and death, firearms markets, and the relationships between gun ownership rates and violence, the report suggests that this knowledge is only “a vital starting point for any constructive dialogue about how to address the problem.”

The Committee also found “no credible evidence” that the passage of right-to-carry (RTC) laws decreases or increases violent crime and almost no empirical evidence was found that the more than 80 prevention programs focused on gun-related violence have had any effect on

children's behavior, knowledge, attitudes or beliefs about firearms. The committee decided that the data available on these questions "are too weak to support unambiguous conclusions or strong policy statements." On the RTC issue, committee member James Q. Wilson, Professor Emeritus of UCLA's Department of Management and Public Policy, filed a dissent proclaiming his belief that evidence presented in studies by John Lott of the American Enterprise Institute and others "suggests that RTC laws do in fact help drive down the murder rate, though their effect on other crimes is ambiguous." The rest of the committee respectfully disagreed with Wilson's conclusion.

The report's recommendations include:

- 1) Supporting development and maintenance of the National Violent Death Reporting System and the National Incident-Based Reporting System;
- 2) Undertaking a research effort to determine whether accurate gun ownership data can be collected with minimal risk to legitimate privacy concerns;
- 3) Providing researchers with appropriate access to data maintained by regulatory and law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms;
- 4) Conducting more studies at the individual level, focusing on the link between firearms and both lethal and non-lethal suicidal behavior;
- 5) Instituting a research program on defensive gun use that would: a) clearly define and understand what is being measured; b) understand inaccurate responses in national gun use surveys; and c) apply known methods or develop new methods to reduce report errors;
- 6) Basing firearm violence prevention programs on general prevention theory. According to the report, government programs should incorporate evaluation into implementation efforts and develop a sustained body of empirical research to study the effect of different safety technologies on violence and crime;
- 7) Carrying out a sustained, systematic research program to assess the effect of targeted policing and sentencing aimed at firearms offenders.

The full report and an executive summary are available at: <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/10881.html>.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Published 22 times a year, the Washington UPDATE is written and produced by the COSSA staff and covers Federal policies and debates relevant to social and behavioral scientists. This issue is the first of Volume 24, which will run until December of 2005.

Should you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for future issues, please feel free to contact Tracey Lesetar at tlesetar@coffa.org or at 202-842-3525.

BROOKINGS CENTER RELEASES ANNUAL REPORT ON EDUCATION

On November 18, 2004, the Brookings Institution's Brown Center on Education Policy released the fifth annual edition of the Center's Report on Education. The report maintains the unique format of past editions by examining three separate subject studies, which were chosen based on interest and availability of research. For 2004, the Brown Center Report on American Education assessed the difficulty of items on the math portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), examined the content training of middle-school math teachers, and reevaluated the Blue Ribbon Schools Program. According to Tom Loveless, Director of the Brown Center and author of the report, its goal is to "try to ask a question that can be answered hopefully through empirical evidence."

The 2003 Federal National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data continues to affirm two key trends that have been in place for several years now: students are making huge strides in mathematics while reading scores remain flat. In 2003, the scores for eighth graders were 15 points higher than in 1990 and fourth graders' math scores were up "a whopping 22 points," while reading scores held steady with only a two to three point difference between the 1990 and more recent scores for both grades. The gains in math scores since 1990 are so significant that the Brown Center set out to determine whether the gains were real by examining the mathematics skills and knowledge measured by the NAEP.

The study found that most mathematic items on the NAEP test are not extraordinarily challenging. Items that purport to assess arithmetic, problem-solving, and algebraic skills are particularly low-level, since the problems are presented with whole numbers instead of

fractions, decimals, and percentages. The report concluded by saying that the rise in NAEP mathematic scores may not be a significant accomplishment, seeing as how “the nation must have confidence that rising test scores mean that students know more real mathematics.”

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to ensure that all secondary teachers attain content mastery in the academic subject they teach by the end of the 2005-2006 school year. To meet content mastery requirements under NCLB, teachers in secondary schools must hold an undergraduate degree in the subject they teach or pass a rigorous exam on the subject content. However, according to the Secretary of Education’s Second Annual Report on Teacher Quality, only 47 percent of the nation’s secondary math teachers met the NCLB requirement for 1999-2000. The Brown Center conducted the study in response to the intense interest surrounding the importance of teacher quality in improving student achievement as it relates to the content mastery provisions of the NCLB.

By studying the results from a survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics among middle school math teachers randomly selected from schools around the country based upon on their education, training, and professional development needs, the Brown Report reached the following conclusions:

- 1) Professional development currently lacks focus, spanning several unrelated topics instead of focusing training on two or three carefully defined content areas and organized into a coherent curriculum.
- 2) Roughly 16,000 mathematics teachers should be targeted for “intensive, content-oriented professional development.”
- 3) Financial incentives should be offered to teachers in a long-term effort to boost content mastery and professional development.

Finally, the 2000 Brown Center Report conducted an evaluation of the federal Blue Ribbon Schools Program (BRSP) and found that several schools won the award despite mediocre scores on state academic achievement tests. After the government revamped the BRSP in 2003, the Brown Center decided that it was an ideal time to replicate their 2000 study to assess the impact of the reforms. Although this year’s report recommends revising the BRSP so that self-

selection is not the basis for Blue Ribbon consideration, Loveless believes, “The program is doing a better job of recognizing exemplary schools today than it did five years ago, but its focus on academic achievements could be even sharper.”

REPORT EXAMINES RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION MAKING

Responding to the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) recognition that a more fully developed social and behavioral science knowledge base is necessary to improve environmental decision making, the National Research Council of the National Academies has issued a report entitled: *Decision Making for the Environment: Social and Behavioral Science Research Priorities*.

A panel chaired by Garry Brewer of the Yale University School of Management and including COSSA Board Member Susan Cutter of the University of South Carolina produced the report. Paul Stern, study director for the Academies’ Committee on the Human Dimensions of Global Change, co-edited the document, which primarily focused upon the social and behavioral sciences other than economics. Economics has been a focus for environmental policy over the years, achieving recognition with a slot on EPA’s Scientific Advisory Board, and evoking keen interest from policymakers interested in the incentives for “cap and trade” emission systems. The report recommends that federal, scientific, and environmental agencies should:

- 1) Support a program of research in the decision sciences to address improving the analytical tools and deliberative processes necessary for good environmental decision-making;
- 2) Sponsor a rigorous effort to build the scientific understanding needed for designing and evaluating institutions for government human activities that affect environmental resources;
- 3) Substantially expand support for research to understand the influence of environmental considerations in business decisions;
- 4) Champion a concerted research effort to better understand and inform environmentally significant individual behavior; and

5) Pursue a research strategy that emphasizes decision relevance to build evidence-based environmental policies. Processes for determining which research is most decision-relevant should be participatory.

The report and its executive summary may be found at: <http://books.nap.edu/catalog/1186.html>.

NIDA AND MICHIGAN RELEASE REPORT ON TEEN DRUG USE

On December 21, 2004, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the University of Michigan jointly released this year's Monitoring the Future Survey results. The Monitoring the Future Survey, now in its 30th year, annually conducts in-school surveys of nationally representative samples of American youth in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades on their use of illicit drugs, including cigarettes and alcohol. The survey not only questions students about substance use, but also asks about short and long term frequency of use, perceived risks of using, and peer attitudes.

This year, the University of Michigan investigators surveyed 50,000 students in over 400 secondary schools. The survey found that the percentage of students who reported using any illicit drug in the prior 12 months continued its gradual decline in 2004, while the proportion of students who are currently smokers continues to decline from its peak levels in the mid-1990's by 50 percent among the nation's 8th and 10th graders and by a third among its 12th graders.

The survey revealed that the prevalence of 8th graders using any illicit drug continued to diminish in 2004, with 15.2 percent indicating any use of such drugs in the prior 12 months. This decline has been occurring since 1996, when 23.6 percent of 8th graders reported drug use during the previous year. Among 10th and 12th graders, the prevalence of illicit drug use in the prior 12 months was 31 and 39 percent last year, respectively. The percentage of secondary school students who have tried an illicit drug in their lifetime was down slightly in 2004, with 22 percent of 8th graders, 40 percent of 10th graders, and 51 percent of 12th graders having reported use of drugs or alcohol at any time.

Marijuana, by far the most widely used of the illicit drugs, also showed a decline in use last year, which coincides with both a two year increase in the proportion of students who see marijuana as dangerous and an increase in students' disapproval of marijuana use.

However, the percentage of students reporting having used any illicit drug other than marijuana saw a small increase in 2004. The indicator for 12th graders showed a slight increase, with marked increases in the non-medical use of OxyContin and Vicodin. One exception for 12th graders was ecstasy use, which showed a slight decrease. Among 8th and 10th graders, there were modest declines in the use of ecstasy, amphetamines, methamphetamine, PCP, Vicodin, ketamine, and steroids.

As for the abuse of legally sold substances, investigators found that the number of teen smokers was still substantial in 2004 – 25 percent of 12th graders, 16 percent of 10th graders, and 9 percent of 8th graders reported smoking in the past 30 days. Drinking among 12th graders also showed some increase last year, which seems to contradict the statistically significant trend of declining alcohol use among all three grade levels since 2001.

Overall, this year's Monitoring the Future Survey found that teen substance abuse continues to decline, but only slightly. A significant number of drugs showed little or no change in use since 2003, though most of their levels are below peak rate. Investigators point to the decline of marijuana use and the hardening of attitudes about its use as one of the more important developments this year, but they remain concerned about the resurgence of inhalant abuse in all three grades and the rise of OxyContin use among high school seniors.

The Monitoring the Future study is funded by the NIDA under a series of investigator initiated, competitive research grants made to the University of Michigan. The authors of the forthcoming report on the 2004 findings are Lloyd Johnston, Patrick O'Malley, Jerald Bachman, and John Schulenberg, who are all psychologists and research professors at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR). The full findings of the survey can be found at www.monitoringthefuture.org.

COSSA NOTE

Transcripts are now available for COSSA's July 2004 seminar entitled, "Growing Old in an Aging America: The Health and Retirement Study's Window Into the Future." Please email cossa@cossa.org for a complimentary copy.

DEMOGRAPHY CENTERS ESTABLISHED BY NIH

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) recently announced that funding has been established for four new centers on the Demography of Aging, focusing on the social and behavioral research on health, savings, retirement, and global aging. These four new centers will join the other nine NIA-supported centers.

The new centers at Harvard University, Princeton University, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Pennsylvania State University reflect an expanded effort by the Institute to promote economic and demographic population research in a rapidly aging world.

“The Centers were developed as research infrastructure to address the big questions in population aging in the U.S. and worldwide,” explained Richard Suzman, NIA Associate Director for Behavioral and Social Research. The centers’ research topics include: the age structure of populations; changes in the levels of disease and disability; the economic costs of disability; cost effectiveness of interventions; migration and geographic concentration of older people; decision-making about retirement; pensions and savings; the relationship between health and economic status; and health disparities by gender and race. Each of the centers has unique but inter-related themes:

Harvard School of Public Health, led by David E. Bloom, will examine the demographic changes and aging throughout the world, with a particular focus on developing countries; **Princeton University**, directed by Christina H. Paxson, will look at the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and health over the life cycle; the **University of North Carolina**, directed by David M. Blau, will investigate the effects of population aging on a variety of topics, including labor force participation and retirement security as well as how nutrition-related improvements in developing countries could influence the development of chronic diseases; **Pennsylvania State University**, led by Mark D. Hayward, will examine the interrelationships among, traits such as SES, race/ethnicity, and health, trends in chronic disease and disability, and bio-demographic approaches to aging and health.

The NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) joined NIA in funding four of the existing nine centers:

University of Southern California and the University of California, Los Angeles, led by Eileen Crimmins, will incorporate a variety of disciplines, including epidemiology, clinical geriatrics, biostatistics, psychology, and biology, to develop models of the status of populations over individuals’ expected life cycles; **RAND Corporation**, directed by Michael Hurd, will examine the relationships between the economic status and well-being of people approaching or in their old age; **University of California, Berkeley**, led by Ronald D. Lee, will continue its focus on the bio-demography of aging, as well as forecasting and analyzing the demographic and fiscal characteristics of the aging population; part of the center at the **University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center**, directed by Linda J. Waite, will focus upon the social aspects of aging by examining social relationships, living arrangements, and family and important bio-behavioral pathways in aging.

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), an advocacy organization for Federal support for the social and behavioral sciences, was founded in 1981 and stands alone in Washington in representing the full range of social and behavioral sciences.

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