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CONGRESS LEAVES FOR ELECTION RECESS; WILL RETURN ON NOVEMBER 13

The 109th Congress recessed for the election season on September 29. It expects to return on November 13. How long it will remain in session may depend on the results of the November 7 mid-term contests.

Before leaving, Congress passed two FY 2007 spending bills - Defense and Homeland Security. The President signed the Defense bill on September 29 and the Homeland Security bill on October 4. The rest of the government will continue to operate on a Continuing Resolution (CR) that funds all the other agencies at either the FY 2007 House-passed or the FY 2006 levels, whichever is lower. (The Senate has not passed any other bills aside from the two signed into law.) The CR will run out on November 17.

Two scenarios for completing action on the FY 2007 appropriations bills remain on the table. One would wrap the outstanding bills in an Omnibus package. The other would postpone further decisions by enacting a long-term CR that would go through the early part of 2007 or run for the entire fiscal year, at FY 2006 funding levels. The former would probably include an across-the-board cut. The latter would devastate the President's American Competitiveness Initiative, including the significant increase for the National Science Foundation.

In enacting the Defense bill, Congress succumbed to the White House desire to limit reductions from its proposed budget. The Senate was forced to restore \$5 billion of a \$9 billion cut to President Bush's request. This will create a problem when Congress confronts its need to fund domestic programs for FY 2007. Earlier in the year, House and Senate moderates had convinced their colleagues to provide at least \$7 billion more than the White House requested

for programs in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education spending bill, including the National Institutes of Health. Most of that extra money has now gone to defense spending.

Congress Cuts University-Based Homeland Security Funding

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spending bill also creates difficulties for its university-based programs of Centers of Excellence and Graduate and Undergraduate Fellowships. Considerably upset with the management of the Science and Technology Directorate, Congress told DHS "to greatly improve its research strategic plan and its budget documents." It directs new Under Secretary Jay Cohen, who was sworn in on August 10, 2006 after his stint as head of the Office of Naval Research, to "develop a five-year research plan, which outlines its priorities, performance measures for each portfolio and resources needed to meet its mission. This plan should also incorporate a business model for its output of services and technologies to its end users."

The FY 2007 spending for University Programs is cut to \$50 million from the FY 2006 level of \$62 million. This reduction would allow no funding of any new Centers of Excellence or new fellowships in FY 2007. The conference report did remove report language from the Senate version of the bill that would have limited current Centers of Excellence, including the Center for Behavioral and Social Research on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism at the University of Maryland, to three years of funding before a re-competition in which the current Centers' grantees could not compete. The conference report directs the Under Secretary to brief the Appropriations Committee on the "University-Based Centers of Excellence Program goals for fiscal year 2007 and outcomes projected for each center for the next three years."

EDUCATION SECRETARY SPELLS OUT REACTION TO HIGHER ED REPORT

On September 26, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings spoke at a National Press Club (NPC) Luncheon, to announce her plan to improve our nation's higher education system. Her proposals came in response to the report released on September 25, by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The Secretary formed the commission in September 2005, and charged it with developing a comprehensive national strategy for higher education so that its graduates can compete in today's global economy. She believes her prescription will make higher education more accessible, affordable, and accountable to students, parents, taxpayers and the government.

"A college diploma has become increasingly essential to achieving the American Dream. There are far too many Americans who want to go to college but cannot—because they're either not prepared or cannot afford it," Spellings told those gathered at the NPC. Making postsecondary education more accessible is a key component to her recommendations. She believes that in order to expand access, high schools must do a better job of educating and preparing students. In addition, in order to graduate students who are actually ready for postsecondary education and today's competitive global work environment, the education system must include a higher set of standards and increased accountability. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has made efforts to hold not only teachers, but the entire education system accountable for the quality of education students receive.

One of the findings in the Commission on the Future of Higher Education's report is the concern postsecondary institutions have about the knowledge base and quality of their incoming students. Too many of these students are entering colleges and universities needing remedial classes in English, math and science, forcing these institutions to divert resources to these classes. The Secretary's proposals include strengthening the K-12 education system to align it more with the expectations higher education institutions have of incoming freshmen. This would mean expanding NCLB's reach into high schools, and redesigning the 12th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test to make it a better indicator of how well states

are preparing students for college. She also mentioned her support for bipartisan legislation that would attempt to increase academic rigor in high school and provide more opportunities for teacher training. The Secretary said high schools and higher education institutions need to recognize that for their mutual benefit they need to change the current nature of their relationship and create a more open dialogue.

Spellings argued that part of making higher education more accessible to students is making it more affordable. According to the Secretary, "Tuition continues to outpace inflation, health care costs and family income levels." Her ideas for increasing affordability start with making the entire financial aid process easier to navigate for students and parents. This would include streamlining the 17 different financial aid programs that currently exist. The Secretary acknowledged that some of her proposals for redesigning the federal financial aid system will require congressional action, such as providing increased funding for need-based financial aid. However, she believes that changes, like simplifying the financial aid process, can be done immediately through the Department of Education. It could partner with states to use existing income and tax data to help students and parents reduce the amount of time spent on completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Other changes she suggested included notifying students about their estimated financial aid package earlier than in the spring of their senior year, thus making the college decision-making process easier.

Increased Transparency Needed

While the Administration and Congress provided no increased funding for Pell grants this year, the Secretary acknowledged that increasing need-based aid is a very important component in alleviating student and parental debt. She noted that Congress has appropriated \$4.5 billion in additional scholarship aid for students who took rigorous courses in high school in the fields of science, technology, engineering or math. The Secretary believes that with increased transparency and more information publicly available regarding costs and productivity, higher education institutions will enact smarter policies and better allocate their resources. These increases in transparency and information will allow consumers—parents, students, taxpayers and the government—to make better informed decisions when it comes to choosing a college.

"No current ranking system of colleges and universities directly measures the most critical point—student performance and learning," said Spellings. She believes that when it comes to the college ranking system higher education needs to recognize that a greater emphasis must be placed on measurable results. And while the Secretary does not envision a one-size-fits-all test for evaluating students, she recommended convening members of the accreditation community to suggest changes to the accreditation standards that would place a greater emphasis on student performance.

The Secretary also suggested creating an organization comprised of states to build upon and link together the 40 higher education information systems that currently exist. She recommended using incentives to encourage states and colleges to collect and report individual student data. This proposal is somewhat controversial, and raises concerns over protecting student privacy and possible abuse of this information. Grover 'Russ' Whitehurst, Director of the Institute of Education Sciences, speaking at the September 20 meeting of the National Board for Education Sciences, offered a way to alleviate such concerns. He proposed having a third party that would act as an intermediary between universities and the federal government. The third party would receive basic student information and an encrypted transcript. They would then assign that student with a unique number that would remain attached to them for their entire academic life, even if they transfer. The third party would then delete all the basic information before forwarding it on to a federal agency which would only see the assigned number, and would have the code to the encrypted transcript. This approach, Whitehurst argued, would help safeguard personal student data, while allowing the Department of Education to collect what it considers vital statistics on the state of higher education.

Two of the more controversial ideas that Spellings discussed involved the growth of for-profit higher education institutions and the use of adjunct teachers. The Secretary believes that despite the controversy surrounding for-profit education these institutions are often innovators and visionaries in higher education. She sees them as providing educational opportunities to sectors of the public that are often underserved by mainstream higher education.

The Secretary also believes we need to find a way to bring more people into the teaching profession by adopting creative methods about the kinds of expertise we can bring in to our schools. She embraced the idea of using adjunct teachers in high schools as well as in higher education, as a way for students to gain practical knowledge and learn from people who work in the real world.

The major theme of Secretary Spellings' proposals is the need for change. The way K-12, higher education, and the financial aid system are managed need fundamental changes if our students are going to be able to compete in today's global economy, she concluded.

A transcript of Secretary Spellings' speech can be found at the Department of Education website <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2006/09/09262006.html>

For more information about the Commission on the Future of Higher Education, and to see a copy of their report please go to <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/index.html>

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN UPWARD MOBILITY

The Brookings Institution and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University have released a policy brief entitled *Opportunity in America: The Role of Education*, as part of their joint venture in the journal *Future of Children*.

Education plays a key role in leveling the playing field between the haves and have-nots in our country. Researchers who contributed to the fall issue of *Future of Children*, however, found that our educational system reinforces rather than equalizes those differences. Despite continued economic growth, researchers found that income levels of the middle class have stagnated. According to the findings, income gaps between the rich and poor are larger now than at any other time in the last 50 years.

Isabel Sawhill, Co-Director of The Brookings Institute Center on Children and Families and a former COSSA Board Member, believes that education can help overcome these barriers to social mobility. However, Sawhill notes that our current education system is failing to live up to that challenge. Sawhill provided three reasons why the system is failing. First, the current K-12 education system is weak, and does a poor job of actually educating children. She proposes the creation of national standards along with a national test and curriculum designed to help students meet those standards. The current system of each state creating its own standards and tests has led to knowledge discrepancies among kids from different states.

Second, K-12 education is financed at the state and local level, therefore making where you live a determining factor in the resources available, and often dictating the experience level of teachers in those schools. This financial system allows for wide disparities between states on what is spent per pupil. Sawhill proposes that the federal government should raise the amount it contributes from the current seven percent of total funding it now provides. The increase could be linked to states improving the quality of their education and thus promote educational equality.

And finally, she mentioned the lack of universal preschool to give all children regardless of socio-economic status a leg up, and the need to improve access to postsecondary education.

Test scores show a wide gap between the scores of low income kids and kids who have more economic advantages. These gaps can be reduced with quality preschool education.

Unfortunately, Head Start and options used by low income parents are often not the same level of quality as programs used by more affluent parents. A higher education degree is becoming more necessary in order to find quality jobs and move up the socio-economic ladder. However, low income kids do not go to college at the same rate as their more well-off counterparts. College enrollment for children from families in the highest income quartile is 82 percent, compared with 54 percent for those in the lowest quartile. College needs to become more accessible to low income and lower middle class students. (see other story above)

According to the researchers who contributed to the journal, there are several ways to achieve this goal. The federal government could put more money in financial assistance programs, and provide financial aid directly to students instead of giving the money to the universities. Universities could also look into ways to reduce costs by focusing on their educational mission, and outsourcing things such as room and board. These steps could increase the opportunities for low income students to attend college, and thus increase their opportunities for social mobility.

The report concludes that to give everyone a fair chance at social mobility in the face of America's growing income disparities and wealth distribution we must reform the education system at every level to help compensate for the disadvantages and differences in family that children face.

For more information on this report please go to www.futureofchildren.org

300 MILLION AND COUNTING: THE U.S. POPULATION TO REACH MILESTONE

According to current projections the U.S. is set to reach a population of 300 million by October of this year. A 50 percent increase from 200 million in 1967, the U.S. is expected to grow to over 400 million people by 2045. To commemorate this milestone, the Population Resource Center, the Population Reference Bureau, the American Sociological Association, the Association of Population Centers and the Population Association of America held a symposium on October 5, to highlight the impacts of America's growing population on the ways we work, live, and are governed.

Linda Jacobsen, Director of Domestic Programs for the Population Reference Bureau, provided an overview of the challenges and prospects of our growing population. According to Jacobsen the significant changes to the size, geographic distribution, and composition of the U.S. population pose considerable challenges, to the environment, education, health care, and political systems. Marlene Lee, Senior Policy Analyst for Domestic Programs, also of the Population Reference Bureau, explored the critical links our growing population has between the education system and the workforce. Lee suggested that the demand for educated workers has changed and that the demographic composition of the labor force will likely change. "This raises a question about where future scientists and engineers will come from if these trends remain the same," says Lee. "Growth in the scientific and engineering workforce will slow, unless the representation of Hispanics and African Americans in these fields increases and or older workers delay retirement or continue to work in a more flexible situation."

Is population growth the only option for a strong economy? According to Joseph Chamie, the short answer is "no." The Research Director for Center for Migration Studies and former Director of the Population Division at the United Nations Secretariat reviewed past attitudes

toward immigration and population growth, reiterating "You don't have to have growth in population to have a strong economy."

While the symposium covered much ground, many questions were raised about solutions to our growing problem. Currently the U.S. is the only industrialized country with population growth, due primarily to immigration. Ranking third in population in the world, after China and India, some demographers predict that the U.S. will be the only developed country among the world's 20 most populous countries in 2050.

Steven Sinding, professor of clinical public health at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, was adamant about the divide between the U.S. and the World. Sinding described the role of the United States in the response to different rates of population growth across nations. Sinding reflected that in the early 60's policymakers thought the world was divided into the low-fertility North and the high-fertility South, which some thought was "growing out of control." Up until the Reagan era, the United States led the international movement to promote programs that reduced fertility in developing countries. Sinding suggests that rapid population growth is no longer the issue it used to be. In countries like South Africa, where growth is overwhelmed by other issues such as HIV/AIDS.

Ready or not, the population continues to change. This will result in difficult future social demands and possible political alterations as the population becomes larger, older, more diverse, and more people continue to move to the South and West. To hear more from this symposium visit: www.300millionusa.org.

NHANES: A SURVEY ON WHEELS

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) is a unique national survey designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the United States. NHANES provides estimates of the health of Americans by examining a sample of people who represent the American population by traveling across the U.S. in specially-equipped mobile examination centers (MEC), with a team of medical staff and other professionals.

On September 28, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) gave a tour of the NHANES MEC to give a firsthand look at this unique and crucial data collection program to health advocates and congressional staff. Comprised of a total of four interconnected trailers, the high tech mobile machine has multiple rooms, each designed to administer a specific test or exam. Engineered to move participants in and out with ease, the mobile unit has a "central command center" that serves as the brain of the entire operation. The technology coordinates participants as they go from room to room, collecting data along way.

NHANES consists of two key data collection efforts: (1) in-home health interviews to collect demographic, socioeconomic, and health data and (2) physical examinations. Depending upon the age of the participant, exams at the MECs will include tests for anemia, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and pre-diabetes, hearing loss, infectious diseases, kidney disease, mental health and cognitive functioning, nutrition, obesity, oral health, osteoporosis, physical fitness and physical functioning, respiratory disease (asthma, chronic bronchitis, and emphysema), sexually transmitted diseases, and vision, among others.

MEC's-specially designed and equipped semi-trailers travel to survey sites across the nation and serve as state-of-the-art clinics. Data collected by NHANES has contributed to improving the public health in several ways. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- Osteoporosis. This condition, in which bones get weaker as people grow old, causes many of the fractures among the elderly. NHANES measures the density of participants' bones.
- Environmental smoke. The last NHANES found that nearly 9 out of 10 nonsmoking Americans were exposed to smoke either at home or on the job.
- Obesity. Despite the public health gains in recent years, more Americans are overweight than ever before. Today, more than half of the adults in the U.S. are overweight, and the number of overweight children and teens has doubled in the past decade. This has led public health experts to look for ways to improve both diet and fitness.
- Changes in Food/Diet. Today consumers can find a wide range of low fat and light foods in their grocery stores, from dinner entrees to snacks. NHANES helps monitor whether these new foods and dietary changes actually are in the best interest of our health.
- Immunizations. The NHANES has turned up important information about the extent of hepatitis B infections, and led to the recommendation that all infants and children be vaccinated against it.

Each year, NHANES examines a nationally representative sample of approximately 5,000 Americans. Data from NHANES are crucially important to understanding health trends, informing policy, and serving as the epidemiological basis for public health and biomedical research.

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON HEALTH POLICY FELLOWSHIPS: SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENTISTS ENCOURAGED TO APPLY

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is now accepting applications for its 2007-2008 Health Policy Fellowships. The Fellowships Program stipend is \$155,000. Each Fellow will receive up to \$84,000 for the year in Washington (contingent on salary level). At the Fellow's option, the remaining funds can be used to extend the Washington D.C. residency through the legislative term or used as leadership development funds once they return to their home institution.

Potential applicants should have backgrounds in the following disciplines: allied health professions; biomedical sciences; dentistry; economics or other social sciences; health services organization and administration; medicine; nursing; public health; or social and behavioral health.

Applicants must be U.S. citizens or have permanent residency status and must obtain documented sponsorship from an eligible institution to support their application. Nonprofit health care organizations and academic centers are eligible sponsors. Eligible institutions may sponsor more than one candidate, but no more than one individual will be selected from any one sponsoring organization.

The RWJF encourages applications from candidates who come from groups that historically have been underrepresented. Exceptional midcareer professionals from academic faculties and nonprofit health care organizations who are interested in experiencing health policy processes at the federal level are also encouraged to apply. For additional information visit:

www.healthpolicyfellows.org

OPASI SOLICITATION FOR ROADMAP TRANS-NIH STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI) recently announced its intention to release a request-for-information (RFI) in mid-October seeking voluntary input from the scientific community, health professionals, patient advocates, and the general public about innovative ideas for cross-cutting initiatives designed to improve and accelerate biomedical and behavioral research and its impact on the health of the nation. The collection of this information is one of the initial steps in the NIH's process of identifying a new cohort of trans-NIH strategic initiatives for Fiscal Year (FY) 2008. ([See Update December 12, 2005](#))

The RFI will provide an opportunity for "respondents to comment on ideas nominated to date by NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs) and by consultation groups that met during the summer. The RFI will also seek idea nominations from the scientific community, health professionals, patient advocates, and the general public on ways to explicitly address barriers to research; accelerate translation of scientific discoveries into clinical practice; and fill research gaps that do not fall within the mission of any one Institute or Center. Approaches may be related to:

- Biomedical or behavioral research;
- Research resources;
- Methods development;
- Research training; and/or
- Research policies.

All nominations submitted will be initially screened to ensure they meet the Inclusion Criteria for the (OPASI) initiatives that meet all of the following criteria:

- Is the proposed initiative truly transforming - could it dramatically affect how biomedical and/or behavioral research is conducted over the next decade?
- Will the outcomes from the proposed initiatives synergistically promote and advance the individual mission of the NIH Institutes and Centers to benefit health?
- Does the proposed initiative require participation from NIH as a whole and/or does it address an area(s) of science that does not clearly fall within the mission of any one IC or Office of the Director program office?
- Is the proposed initiative something that no other entity is likely or able to do, and is there a public health benefit to having the results of the research in the public domain?

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Executive Director: Howard J. Silver
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President: Myron Gutmann

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (**COSSA**) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.

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1522 K Street, NW, Suite 836
Washington, D.C. 20005
Phone: (202) 842-3525
Fax: (202) 842-2788

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Justice Research and Statistics Association
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Population Association of America
Social Science History Association
Society for Research on Adolescence
Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion
Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality
Sociologists for Women in Society
Southern Political Science Association
Southern Sociological Society
Southwestern Social Science Association

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American Council of Learned Societies
American Institutes for Research
Brookings Institution
Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences
Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research
Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan
Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research
Institute for Women's Policy Research
National Bureau of Economic Research
National Opinion Research Center
Population Reference Bureau
Social Science Research Council

