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Attacking and Defending Science: It's Been a Busy Month

Those who have questioned the grant making process at the National Science Foundation (NSF), including projects in the social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBE), and those who have defended that process and those grants have had a busy month. Many of the issues remain unresolved.

With the Coburn Amendment restricting NSF's support for political science research now law, both House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) and House Science, Space, and Technology (SST) Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) had indicated their intention to question NSF's funding for the SBE sciences (see [Update, April 15, 2013](#)).

Two Hearings and Questions about NSF's Awarding of Individual Grants.

On the morning of April 17, the full SST Committee held a hearing with John Holdren, the President's Science Adviser and head of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, as the witness. In the afternoon, SST's Research Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Larry Bucshon (R-IN), held a hearing with NSF Acting Director Cora Marrett and National Science Board (NSB) Chairman Dan Arvizu as the witnesses.

At the hearing with Holdren, Chairman Smith asked about certain NSF grants that he suggested were not a smart way to spend the taxpayer's money. He appeared somewhat distrustful of the review process that allowed such grants to receive funding. Later Rep. Bill Posey (R-FL) took up the same argument, this time, citing Sen. Coburn's amendment, with specific reference to NSF's funding of political science grants. In addition, Rep. David Schweikert (R-AZ) also questioned the merit review system and emphasized the need for "priority setting" in funding basic research. One of the stranger questions came from first-term Rep. Randy Weber (R-TX), who wanted to know the constitutional justification for funding science and technology beyond the specific language in Article I Section 8 giving Congress the power over patents and copyrights.

Holdren defended the merit review process, albeit admitting it was not perfect. He also strongly argued that it was "a perilous business" for Congress to substitute its judgment for that of the scientists who know the strengths and weaknesses of proposed research. He criticized the Coburn Amendment as "too narrowly drawn," arguing that it would leave out important domains of political science. He cited the research of the late Nobel Prize-winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom as an example.

In the afternoon hearing Rep. Bucshon's opening statement criticized NSF for funding a study of the International Court of Justice. In the same statement he noted his strong support for NSF funding in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, engineering, cybersecurity, and STEM education. Note what is missing here. In her testimony, Marrett defended NSF support for "all fields." She also noted that NSF intends to spend money in FY 2014 to "improve the operational execution of the merit review process." The NSF, she said, will "support a multi-year effort to improve major aspects of the process, including use of virtual meeting technologies, technological support for the management of reviewers and reviews and increased automation of the preliminary processing of proposals, and demand management."

NSB Chairman Arvizu testified on the Board's reaction to the Coburn amendment. He said that the NSF and the NSB "will fully comply with the law." However, "we would like to raise concerns about how these strictures can undermine the merit review process and the progress of science...the Board believes that legislatively imposing restrictions on a class of research will not serve the national interest." He too cited Elinor Ostrom. He then went on to strongly defend the merit review process, pointing out that the NSB had recently produced a report reiterating its commitment to this principle for grant selection.

Subcommittee Ranking Democrat Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-IL) expressed support for the SBE sciences

and referenced the research of Nobel Prize-winning Stanford economist Al Roth that led to exchanges for kidney transplants, which has undoubtedly saved lives. Roth recently spoke about his research at a COSSA-American Economic Association congressional briefing (see [Update, April 15, 2013](#)).

Chairman Smith attended this hearing as well, again questioning the process of approval of NSF grants, while also claiming he was not trying to "micromanage" the Foundation. He called for new guidelines that NSF grants should "directly benefit the American people."

The High Quality Research Act and a Bunch of Letters

The day following the hearings, the SST Committee released what it called a "discussion draft" of what was titled the "High Quality Research Act" (HQRA). According to the draft, the NSF director, prior to making a grant, would be required to issue a statement on a public website certifying that the research project: 1) is in the interests of the United States to advance the national health, prosperity, or welfare and to secure the national defense by promoting the progress of science, 2) is the finest quality, is groundbreaking, and answers questions or solves problems that are of utmost importance to the society at large, and 3) is not duplicative of other research projects funded by the Foundation or other Federal science agencies. The bill also encourages the OSTP to figure out "how these requirements may be implemented in other Federal science agencies." This moved the situation from attacking SBE to arousing the ire of the entire scientific community.

A week later, Chairman Smith sent a letter to Acting Director Marrett requesting "detailed information on specific research projects awarded NSF grants." He suggested that "Members of the Committee would benefit from access to the scientific/technical reviews and Programs Officers Review Analysis" for five projects funded by the SBE directorate.

The proposed legislation and the subsequent letter led SST Ranking Member Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) to write the Chairman a scathing letter excoriating him for substituting his judgment for those of peer reviewers regarding individual research grants. She declared: "In the history of the Committee, no Chairman has ever put themselves forward as an expert in the science that underlies specific grant proposals funded by NSF." Furthermore, Johnson argued, "Interventions in grant awards by political figures with agendas, biases, and no expertise is the antithesis of the peer review processes." She also proclaimed that "the progress of science itself-- across all fields, including the social and behavioral sciences-- is in the interest of the taxpayer." Finally, Johnson concluded: "The moment you compromise both the merit review process and the basic research mission of NSF is the moment you undo everything that has enabled NSF to contribute so profoundly to our national health, prosperity, and welfare."

Responding to Johnson in a letter a day later, Smith defended his actions, writing that "the information I requested will help the Committee better understand just how NSF administers this [grant awarding] process." The Committee also has, Smith argued, a "responsibility to conduct oversight on how these [taxpayer] dollars are spent."

The President Gets into the Act and the Science Adviser Expands the Defense

On April 29, President Obama showed up at the National Academy of Sciences to help celebrate the 150th Anniversary of its chartering by President Lincoln in 1863. In the course of his remarks, the President joined the discussion of the attacks on merit review and the SBE sciences. He said, "One of the things that I've tried to do over these last four years and will continue to do over the next four years is to make sure that we are promoting the integrity of our scientific process; that not just in the physical and life sciences, but also in fields like psychology and anthropology and economics and political science-- all of which are sciences because scholars develop and test hypotheses and subject them to peer review-- but in all the sciences, we've got to make sure that we are supporting the idea that they're not subject to politics, that they're not skewed by an agenda, that, as I said before, we make sure that we go where the evidence leads us. And that's why we've got to keep investing in these sciences."

Additionally, he argued, "And what's true of all sciences is that in order for us to maintain our edge, we've got to protect our rigorous peer review system and ensure that we only fund proposals that promise the biggest bang for taxpayer dollars. And I will keep working to make sure that our scientific research does not fall victim to political maneuvers or agendas that in some ways would impact on the integrity of the scientific process. That's what's going to maintain our standards of scientific excellence for years to come."

On May 2, John Holdren gave the keynote talk at the AAAS Forum on Science and Technology Policy and expanded on the President's speech. He told the Forum attendees: "I want to make a further point about the kinds of research that the Federal government is and should be funding. Members of Congress have recently suggested, variously, either that the social sciences are not really science and should not be supported by the tax-payers at all; or that research in political science, at least, should only be supported if the NSF will certify to Congress, for each grant, that the research will advance either the economy or national security (a provision now actually embodied in law in the most recent Continuing Resolution governing spending for the remainder of FY 13); or that all taxpayer-funded research should have to pass the test of offering a predictable benefit for some national interest."

He then made clear the position of the Administration: "First, the social and behavioral sciences--which of course include economics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, as well as political science--are sciences. Researchers in these fields develop and test hypotheses; they publish results in peer-reviewed journals; and they archive data for so that others can replicate their results.

"Second, while much of the work in these sciences meets the definition of basic research--expanding our understanding of ourselves and our surroundings-- much work in the social and behavioral sciences is aimed at having (or ends up having without being aimed that way) practical application to society's direct benefit."

He then provided some examples: "Political science research helps us understand the motives and actions of nations and peoples around the world, strengthening our foreign policy, and it helps understand our own democracy and how to make it stronger. Economics research has clarified not only the economic importance of innovation but also its determinants, which in turn have helped us craft policies that effectively promote innovation and thus economic growth."

In addition, he said, "Social and behavioral research has helped us make hurricane warnings more effective, improve methods of instruction and training in school and in the workplace, and manage commons resources efficiently without centralized regulation. And it has taught us that social-distancing strategies, like staying home from work or school, can be a crucial complement to vaccination strategies when it comes to breaking the transmission of influenza from person to person."

Holdren went on, "Third, whether we are talking about research in the social and behavioral sciences, or in the natural sciences, it makes no sense at all to confine taxpayer support to those projects for which a likely direct contribution to the national interest can be identified in advance. (Unless, of course, the national interest is defined to include expanding the boundaries of knowledge, which would be fine with me but is not, I think, what members of Congress proposing the criterion have in mind.)"

Finally, he concluded this section of his speech by declaring that "Imposing such a national-interest criterion in the form its sponsors seem to have in mind would throw out the basic-research baby with the bathwater, inasmuch as basic research constitutes precisely that subset of research activity that is aimed at expanding knowledge without reference to possible applications."

Former COSSA President Prewitt Pens a SCIENCE Editorial

A further defense came in the form of an editorial in the May 3 issue of SCIENCE Magazine by Ken

Prewitt, a former COSSA President and a professor at Columbia's School of Public and International Affairs. Prewitt's piece, entitled *Is Any Science Safe?*, was a warning to the science community that passage of the Coburn Amendment, seen as an attempt to micromanage NSF, presented three risks. First, it favored research that promises near-term benefits, "overlooking the fact that there is knowledge useful under today's conditions and knowledge that becomes useful when conditions change." Secondly, Coburn's criteria (national security and economic interests of the U.S.) weaken the way science builds theories. He misses, Prewitt claims, "that understanding is embedded in broad theories about how governments work, which in turn involved studying topics seemingly unrelated to security or the economy: bureaucratic inefficiencies, moral hazards, unintended consequences, organizational decision-making, coalition-building and much more." The third risk is to peer review. This results from a "congressional intimidation" that invites responsiveness to perceived congressional priorities rather than reliance on the search for excellence through peer review.

Also adding their voices to this discussion were three former NSF directors-- Arden Bement, Rita Colwell, and Neal Lane-- as well as three former NSF Chairmen-- Richard Zare, Warren Washington, and Steve Beering. In a May 8 letter to Smith and Johnson, they argued that the HQRA "will have a chilling and detrimental impact on the merit-based review process."

A similar letter to the SST Committee's leaders, signed by 18 former Assistant Directors including SBE's David Lightfoot and Norman Bradburn, criticizes the HQRA and Smith's letter requesting the review of the five questioned grants.

NSF Responds to Smith

During the week of May 13, NSF responded to Chairman Smith's letter. They refused to provide access to the Committee of the reviewer's comments, but offered to meet with the Committee to further explain the NSF merit review process. The Chairman was not happy with this apparent non-response to his more detailed request.

As Congress left for the Memorial Day week-long recess, it appeared that NSF and the SST Committee were seeking a way to resolve this confrontation. Committee leadership meetings with NSB members, a delegation of distinguished scientists, industrialists, and higher education leaders, and the NSF leadership, have pushed for an end to the hostilities. The distractions of the past month, including the HQRA, have thrown the Committee off its schedule to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act, which includes the NSF.

Through all this COSSA has met and communicated with NSF leadership, including SBE, congressional staff, its members, the higher education community, and the rest of the scientific community, including the Coalition for National Science Funding, which sent a letter to the SST leadership and the Congressional leadership signed by 110 scientific societies, coalitions, and universities defending NSF, its support for all the sciences, and its merit review process.

Copies of the speeches, letters, and the editorial mentioned in this article are available on the COSSA website at www.cossa.org.

FY 2014 Appropriations Process Begins: House and Senate on Different Paths

Despite the continued disagreement between the House and Senate over how much the government should spend on the discretionary part of the budget, the FY 2014 appropriations process has begun.

On May 21 the House Appropriations Committee, chaired by Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY), approved its bill for spending on Military Construction and the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The following day, the Committee agreed on funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Also on May 21, the Appropriators divided up the \$967 billion in the House Budget Resolution, which presumes the continuation of sequestration into next year, among its 12 subcommittees in a process called the 302(b) allocations. The allocations favor the Defense and security subcommittees and provide significant cuts to the panels that allocate spending for the domestic agencies, with the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee particularly hard hit.

DHS Funding Bill Has Strong Support for University Programs; Lots of Report Language

In the DHS bill, the Appropriations Committee recommended FY 2014 funding of \$467 million for Research, Development and Innovation, the same as the President's request. Yet the panel is still unhappy about the way the Department manages its research and development portfolio. In the report accompanying the bill, the Committee states: "The Department must do more than set high-level priorities for terrorism prevention, immigration enforcement, border security, first responders, cybersecurity and disaster resilience. It must establish a formal, comprehensive process for identifying capability gaps related to those priorities with a far greater degree of specificity. Such a process must include permanent mechanisms for S&T to regularly solicit input and receive constructive feedback from each component on capability gaps and research and technology requirements, and must ensure that component-level R&D activities complement but do not overlap with S&T activities...The Department's R&D process must be able to measure the return on investment within the R&D portfolio, such as how often projects transition to an acquisition program or into the operational environment. This lack of measurement makes it difficult to defend or fully fund projects under the current fiscal constraints." The DHS is ordered to provide the Committee a report for FY 2015 on how it is improving its efforts in these areas.

The report also includes the following language directing DHS to include in its budget justification for fiscal year 2015, and hereafter, "the following information for each project in excess of \$100,000: project description, justification and scope; prior year key events, current year planned key events and budget year key events; funding history; available funding spend plan (projected obligations by year appropriated); contract information; project schedule to include milestones; explanation for delayed milestones; type of research (basic; applied; advanced technology development; advanced component development and prototypes; or system development and demonstration), technical readiness level (as applicable) and transition plans."

The Committee provided \$40 million for the University Programs account, \$9 million more than recommended by the President. This account funds the Centers of Excellence program at U.S. colleges and universities, which, the Committee report declares, "provide critical homeland security-related research and education to address high-priority domestic security related issues and to enhance homeland security capabilities over the long term." Nonetheless, report language "directs the Department to brief the Committee on the method used to measure performance of the Centers not later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this Act."

In the meantime, the Senate Appropriations Committee, chaired by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), asserts it will begin its markups of FY 2014 spending bills using the Senate Budget Resolution cap of \$1.058 trillion and its assumption, following the President, that the sequester will not exist next year. The Senate panel will probably begin its process with the Military Construction/Veterans' Affairs bill sometime in June.

The stalemate over the funding caps suggests not much progress on most of the spending bills this year, with a Continuing Resolution and an Omnibus bill late in the year once again the solution to the stalemate on America's priorities. Although the respective chairs of the Budget Committees Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) and Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) may be trying to work out a compromise, they are not getting much support from their respective allies in the Congress and the White House.

NIH Appears Before Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services to Discuss FY 2014 Budget

On May 15, the National Institutes of Health made its annual appearance before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Subcommittee to discuss the President's Fiscal Year (FY) FY 2014 budget request for the agency. Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) welcomed NIH director Francis Collins back to the subcommittee. Collins was accompanied by directors from several institutes: Tony Fauci (Allergy and Infectious Diseases), Gary Gibbons (Heart, Lung, and Blood), Richard Hodes (Aging), Story Landis (Neurological Disorder and Stroke), and Harold Varmus (Cancer).

Harkin, in his introductory remarks, noted that "this is a perilous moment for NIH and indeed for the future of medical research in this country." He emphasized that since the ending of the five-year doubling effort in 2003, "NIH funding has dropped in real terms by 22 percent...The purchasing power of NIH's appropriation has fallen by more than one-fifth over the past decade. This year, FY 2013, NIH funding will drop in actual dollars by \$1.7 billion below last year almost entirely because of sequestration." Even more alarming, declared Harkin, is that a researcher's chance of getting a grant approved by NIH will drop to just 16 percent, the lowest success rate in NIH's history. At the same time, he continued, it comes "when the potential for scientific breakthroughs has perhaps never been better...It is no wonder that some are saying our nation's status as the undisputed leader in biomedical research is under threat," Harkin said. He pointed out that the President's budget "offers a welcome response to this disturbing decline."

The President's budget request calls for \$31.1 billion for NIH in FY 2014 and "would not only reverse all the cuts that are occurring this year but result in an increase over fiscal year 2012, the Chairman explained. A third of the increase is \$40 million for the new BRAIN initiative. Harkin concluded his opening statement by noting that he wants to do everything that he can to "help boost NIH's budget this year." Noting that NIH enjoys more bipartisan support perhaps than any other agency under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee, Harkin stated the problem is that at the same time some of his colleagues are requesting a strong commitment to NIH funding but also want sequestration to continue in FY 2014. He promised that if sequestration stays in effect next year, there is "no chance that we will get close to the President's request for NIH let alone back the FY 2012 level. So, it just won't happen. We are not going to savage other functions in education, health, labor, Center for Disease Control and Prevention and others, which are already at minimal levels," the chairman maintained.

Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS) cited examples of where NIH-supported research is a "catalyst behind many of the advances that are now helping Americans live longer and healthier lives." Without realizing the irony, given Congress' questioning of NIH support for economics research, he cited a "study lead by the economist at RAND Corporation stated that the cost of dementia care is projected to double over the next 30 years surpassing health care expenditures for both heart disease and cancer." Without a way to prevent, cure, or effectively treat dementia, Moran suggested, it will be difficult if not impossible to reign in cost. Stating that "the sciences confronted similar health challenges in the past and prevailed," Moran argued that "we must prioritize our federal commitment to NIH. It is crucial that our next generation of biomedical researchers, the ones who will develop better and most cost-effective health care remained in the scientific research field." Without adequate and sustained federal support for medical research, trainees will be driven from medical fields or into the arms of the U.S.' global competitors, said Moran. Citing China's government pledge to increase basic research investment by 26 percent, Moran concluded his remarks by noting that "without continued investment in NIH, we jeopardize our current scientific progress, risk losing a generation of scientists and stunt our nation's global competitiveness.

In his opening statement, Collins recognized the Subcommittee's "long history of supporting NIH's mission to seek fundamental knowledge and apply it in ways that enhance human health, lengthen life and reduce suffering (and not to just cure disease)." He thanked Harkin, who recently announced his retirement in 2014, for his "strong commitment and for supporting biomedical research over these years."

Collins began his testimony by pointing out the "devastating blow" of sequestration to "NIH and the

entire biomedical research enterprise." The NIH is "absorbing a \$1.7 billion cut" to its budget. Without action by the Congress, Collins stressed, the sequester will result in a lost \$19 billion over the next ten years. He emphasized "that almost 22 percent of the purchasing power for research has been lost versus ten years ago," as noted by the chairman. "Consequences are stark," Collins lamented. Looking back at 2003, as a direct result of the efforts of the Subcommittee, NIH was supporting more than 38,216 research project grants. A decade later, he continued, "with all the scientific opportunity in front of us, that number has fallen by more than 3,300 grants. According to Collins, the drop is particularly severe in FY 2013. The agency will be funding 700 fewer new and competing research project grants than in FY 2012, he explained. This cut in support for biomedical research in the U.S. is particularly troubling when one considers the investments being made in the rest of the world, said Collins, noting that he cannot gloss over the severity of this situation: "The potential damage, the scientific momentum, economic growth and morale is profound."

He highlighted the BRAIN Initiative, a part of the FY 2014 budget, which has "the goal of accelerating the development and application of new technologies that will enable researchers to produce dynamic pictures of the brain that show how individual brain cells and complex neural circuits interact, all at the speed of thought." He continued, "By measuring activity at the scale of circuits and networks in living organisms, we can begin to translate data into models that will decode sensory experience, motor activity and potentially even memory, emotion, and thought."

During the question and answer session of the hearing, Harkin expressed his concern that peer reviewers, "consciously or unconsciously...might tend to favor safer incremental advances and to void ideas that are bolder but make more risk." He wondered whether there was any validity to that concern.

Collins responded that it is "certainly an area of considerable concern for all" and noted that the agency has a number of programs whose aim is to encourage innovation and cited as examples the Pioneer Awards of the Transformative R01 and the New Innovator Awards. To apply to the programs, he explained, you have to have "an out-of-the-box idea." He noted that this is a Common Fund effort and a number of the institutes have also initiated efforts of that sort as well. "There's no magic here in terms of laws of innovation potential," Collins explained, "just the fact that we're only funding 15-16 percent or less of the applications that come in. There is a lot of innovation at the 18th percentile and the 22nd percentile." He acknowledged the difficulty of telling the difference between a grant that scores in the 11th percentile and one that scores in the 17th percentile, "yet one is going to get funded and one may not." According to the director, the real anxiety is about "how much talent is being wasted and how many ideas are not getting followed up on."

Full Appropriations Committee Chair Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) expressed her "sense of joy and pride" in representing NIH. She noted that she and Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD) want to "be an advocate for the kinds of resources policy and framework so that you get to be what the American people want you to do which is find cures to diseases, to find containments of disease, to look for those things that will even prevent them from happening or preventing them from escalating." Noting the extramural programs in the state of Maryland (John Hopkins, University of Maryland, and the other Land Grant universities), Mikulski stressed the need to look at the impact of sequestration on jobs, on the economy, and the impact of growth. She pledged "to work [her] earrings off" to help the agency achieve its mission.

Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL), Ranking Member on the full committee, pledged to work with Mikulski to see if "they can plus up NIH." He then turned his attention to the Institutional Development Awards (IDeA), stressing that "it is important to recognize that the next scientific discovery may come from anywhere. You don't really know where." Shelby explained that he believes that institutions that do not historically have high success rates at obtaining NIH awards can contribute to biomedical research and that he further believes that "we need to give these institutions an opportunity." Collins responded that he agreed that there is a wonderful opportunity for capacity building in the competitive IDeA program. He also noted that he is expecting the release of a report in the very near future from the Institute of Medicine on the program.

Shelby also discussed the National Cancer Institute's Provocative Question initiative, arguing that it is an "innovative approach to define some of the unanswered questions in cancers." He asked Varmus to share some of the problems identified in the questions and what questions have been awarded grants. Varmus answered that the program is only a little over a year old and therefore the Institute does not have results yet. For the first year, the agency posed 24 questions which "vary dramatically and include questions about why people with profound obesity have increased risk of dying of certain kinds of cancer." The Institute has also asked "questions about behavior and why do people still smoke when they know how [bad] that smoking is." The agency was able to fund slightly over 50 applications, according to Varmus. The funded grants address most but not all of the 24 questions, he said.

Noting that Kansas is a "very rural state," Moran expressed his concerns about participation in clinical trials. In order for the trials to have validity "it takes a wide range of demographics and characteristics...Some people based on geography, age, other demographic and personal characteristics, perhaps the fear of government research, lack of awareness of clinical trial availability," appear unwilling to take part in this research. He questioned what he or the NIH could do to make sure Kansans are aware of the opportunity to participate in clinical trials and potentially improve their health and save their lives. Collins replied that the agency is statutorily required to reach out to a diverse population. Accordingly, it tracks that carefully. He highlighted the website clinicaltrials.gov, which has a search capability. He noted his appreciation to Moran for his offer to help get the word out.

SBE Advisory Committee Meets; Youth Violence, Future of Surveys, and Science of Learning Discussed

The SBE Advisory Committee (AC) to the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate met on May 20 and 21. The AC, chaired by AnnaLee Saxenian of the University of California, Berkeley, heard from Myron Gutmann, the Assistant Director for SBE, for the last time. Gutmann will be stepping down from his position in August. The Committee presented Gutmann with a letter of appreciation for his leadership of the Directorate and his service to the SBE community.

In providing his update to the AC, Gutmann did not reveal any figures for the final FY 2013 SBE Budget, nor did he indicate how the Foundation and the Directorate are going to interpret the Coburn amendment limiting the political science program to projects that "promote national security and the economic interests of the U.S." Suggesting a decision on implementation was "weeks away," he instead pointed out how the political science program's review panel was meeting and had been given instruction to proceed as if this was a normal situation.

He reviewed the initiatives in the FY 2014 budget and remarked that the SBE was clearly invested in the major NSF-wide initiatives and the new presidential program called BRAIN, which would enhance the Behavioral and Cognitive Division's cognitive science and neuroscience activities. He noted that NSF had in January 2013 renewed the Panel Survey on Income Dynamics (PSID) and that data collection has begun. He also highlighted a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Institute of Justice that will enhance cooperation with the directorate's Law and Social Sciences program.

Acting NSF Director Cora Marrett met with the AC and expressed her strong support for the SBE sciences despite the current political difficulties. Like other sciences at NSF, the SBE sciences produce "fundamental knowledge," she told the Committee. She further declared that "basic research is just as important in SBE as in the other sciences." Although SBE is a model of interdisciplinarity, Marrett said, "we should never lose sight of the core" in the wide range of disciplines the Directorate supports.

She acknowledged that NSF and SBE need to do better in communicating their significance to the

public. She praised the report *Bringing People Into Focus*, (http://www.nsf.gov/about/congress/reports/sbe_research.pdf), produced by NSF to highlight research in the SBE sciences. She urged the panel members to continue a dialogue with policymakers and the public in a constant effort to gain respect for these sciences.

Youth Violence Report

The AC heard from Brad Bushman of Ohio State University and Katherine Newman of Johns Hopkins University, who were the co-chairs of the special panel that produced the report on youth violence requested by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), Chairman of the House Commerce, Science, Justice Appropriations Subcommittee. (See [Update February 25, 2013](#) for a summary of the report and [Update, March 25, 2013](#) for a report on Bushman's appearance at a hearing before the Subcommittee.)

Both stressed the rarity of school rampage shootings and the differences between everyday violence experienced in many urban areas. They also indicated that a major issue is why kids who are told or warned about possible violence are reluctant to tell authorities. Bushman and Newman expressed that the report, aside from reviewing what we know, also produced an agenda for future research. Topics would include: 1) causes and consequences of deviant behavior; 2) social rejection and peer group difficulties; 3) family influences and parental responses regarding anti-social behavior; 4) the effectiveness of schools in preventing deviant behavior; 5) media violence and the impact of "extreme masculine" gender socialization; 6) the role of social media including possible amplification of ostracism; 7) access to weapons and the sociology of gun markets; and 8) how to use data mining techniques to understand, predict, and prevent violence.

The Future of Survey Research

Advisory Committee member Jon Krosnick of Stanford reported on two conferences that dealt with the future of survey research for NSF's three major surveys-- The PSID, the General Social Survey, and the American National Election Studies. (The last one may have problems meeting the Coburn criteria for continued funding.) The conferences, which took place on October 3-4, 2012 and November 8-9, 2012, reviewed all the issues confronting researchers, from declining response rates to increased costs to interviewer training to how to weight samples to the use of biomarkers to whether the Internet is the answer. With regard to the three surveys, Gutmann suggested that changes will come, to save money in order to create the capacity to fund new surveys. For information and the presentations from the conferences, go to <https://iriss.stanford.edu/content/future-survey-research-nsf>.

The Science of Learning

David Lightfoot, Gutmann's predecessor as SBE AD and now at Georgetown University, appeared before the Committee to report on two workshops to determine the future of NSF's support for the science of learning. The Science of Learning Centers, which have provided significant research in this area for the past ten years, are scheduled for phase-out in the next two years.

Lightfoot argued strongly for continuation of NSF support for this new scholarly community of researchers on this important topic. He called for a new SBE program (or even a division) for the Science of Learning, which he described as encompassing fundamental biology combined with environmental influences that underpin how we learn. He also highlighted six areas where NSF funding commensurate with its support for the Centers would provide significant research opportunities. These include: What are the types, mechanisms, and domains of learning? What is the optimal timing for different types of learning; should it be slow or fast, early or late? What information does the mind/brain select and store, and how does it represent that information and incorporate it into its computational operations? How does (epi)genetics affect learning; how do experience and learning affect the genes? How can machines help us better understand how humans learn, and how can they better assist learning? How can we relate our understanding of the cellular and molecular mechanisms of learning to the circuit and systems-level computational operations of

mind and brain?

He suggested a diverse funding portfolio with diverse funding mechanisms, including networks, which would work with other federal agencies and in international collaborations. Finally he broached the idea of a National Synthesis Center, modeled on a current effort by the Biology Directorate that would "translate" the research findings for policymakers and the public and would hold an Annual Meeting.

Although Gutmann expressed strong support for this area of research, there was pushback from some AC members who questioned why such strong support should be devoted to understanding the science of learning when other areas may be just as worthy. The supporters linked this to the BRAIN initiative and the importance of understanding the mind-brain relationship. Gutmann also pointed out the NSF Cyberlearning Program as a major NSF commitment that includes the SBE directorate.

Advisory Committee member Ken Bollen of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill reported on the NSF-wide Subcommittee on Statistical Sciences at NSF. The issue confronting the panel is how to integrate "Data Science" into NSF's programs, research, and training. With Big Data initiatives appearing in many places, this issue has taken on a new urgency. The panel expects to report in November.

NORC President John Thompson Nominated to Lead Census Bureau

John H. Thompson, currently the President of NORC at the University of Chicago, who spent 27 years at the U.S. Census Bureau, including serving as the senior career officer responsible for all aspects of the 2000 Decennial Census, has been nominated by President Obama to return to the Bureau as its new Director. Thomas Mesenbourg has been serving as Acting Director since the departure of Robert Groves in August 2012. Thompson will become the first Census Director to serve under the new law providing a five-year term for the leader of the Bureau.



Thompson left Census in 2002 to become NORC's Executive Vice President for Survey Operations. Since its founding in 1941 by Harry Field, NORC, a COSSA member, has conducted high-quality social science research in the public interest. It is the major contractor for the NSF-supported General Social Survey. In 2008, Thompson was named NORC President. Under Thompson's leadership, the organization expanded its operations and opened a number of offices outside Chicago.

Among Thompson's publications are: "Challenges, Innovation, and Quality for the 21st Century," "A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data. Technical Appendices," (U.S. Census Bureau Series), "The Future of Survey Research: Opportunities and Challenge," and "Organization and Administration of the Census."

An elected Fellow of the American Statistical Association (ASA), Thompson has been Chair of the Social Statistics Section of the ASA and he chaired the 2009 ASA Committee on Fellows. He is currently serving as a member of the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) at the National Academy of Sciences. He participated as a member of the Panel on the Design of the 2010 Census Program of Evaluations and Experiments and currently serves on the Panel to Review the 2010 Census, both sponsored by CNSTAT.

Thompson has a B.S. and M.S. in Mathematics, both from Virginia Tech University.

Bureau Faces Many Challenges, Including Limiting Legislation

Thompson's nomination is subject to Senate confirmation. If confirmed, he will take over an agency in its fourth year of preparation for the 2020 decennial. Congress has made it clear to the Bureau

that the 2020 count needs to cost considerably less than 2010. To that end, the Bureau has been in the midst of a significant research and testing program to figure out how to conduct 2020, including using the Internet.

At the same time, the Bureau continues to face political pressure, particularly from Republicans. Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) and Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) have introduced legislation again this year to make the American Community Survey (ACS) voluntary. The House went further in 2012 and voted to abolish the ACS, although the Senate would not follow suit. Even more disturbing is legislation introduced by Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC) to abolish all the surveys conducted by the Bureau except for the decennial. The bill would limit that count to questions that have a direct relationship to reapportionment.

Administration Issues Open Data Policy

On May 9, President Obama issued an Executive Order (EO) on Open Data, whose general principle is that "Openness in government strengthens our democracy, promotes the delivery of efficient and effective services to the public, and contributes to economic growth. As one vital benefit of open government, making information resources easy to find, accessible, and usable can fuel entrepreneurship, innovation, and scientific discovery that improves Americans' lives and contributes significantly to job creation."

To implement the EO, that same day, the Office of Management and Budget issued a Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies to require them "to collect or create information in a way that supports downstream information processing and dissemination activities. This includes using machine-readable and open formats, data standards, and common core and extensible metadata for all new information and collection efforts." Agencies would also have to ensure "information stewardship" through the use of open licenses, and need to conduct reviews for privacy, confidentiality, security, or other restrictions to release of the data. Finally, the executive branch would build or modernize information systems to maximize interoperability and accessibility, maintain internal and external data asset inventories, enhance information safeguards, and clarify information management responsibilities.

There is a reference to "Project Open Data," an OMB and Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) resource that will provide an online repository of best practices, tools and schema for agencies to adopt the framework presented in the memorandum.

Regarding Open Data, which refers to publicly available data structured in a way that enables people to fully discover it and use it, OMB reminds agencies that under its Open Government Directive they must adopt a presumption in favor of openness. The Open Data should be accessible in "convenient, modifiable, and open formats that can be retrieved, downloaded, indexed and searched."

The data are "described fully so that consumers have sufficient information to understand their strengths weaknesses, analytical limitations, security requirements, as well as how to process them." The open data are reusable. They should be published in primary forms and made available as quickly as possible. Finally, there should be a point of contact to assist with data use and to respond to complaints.

The full memorandum is available at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2013/m-13-13.pdf>.

DBASSE Holds Hearing on Data Access

In the meantime the National Research Council's Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (DBASSE) held a two-day meeting in which groups and individuals presented testimony regarding open data. (This followed two days of testimony regarding open access publishing.)

DBASSE's Executive Director Robert Hauser, put back on his researcher and data collector hat as the long-time principal investigator of the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study to comment on the issue. He indicated that there is nothing new about public access to federally supported research data. There are dozens of social and biosocial surveys that have been created for public use and provide templates for sound data policy, including the Public Use Microdata Files from the Decennial Census. In addition, Hauser pointed out that "access to federally supported research data will depend heavily on the responsibilities and actions of investigators and not merely on those of agency personnel. As in publication, that will cost time, effort, money-- and require incentives for compliance." Furthermore, Hauser declared that "Data do not speak for themselves." They require documentation, he said, especially when the data are manipulated to yield revised, linked, or combined data products. He also argued that some investigators now invoke bogus claims of sensitivity or privacy to keep data proprietary. Any new rules should consider the user as well as the use of the data, he contended. Finally, Hauser made reference to a DBASSE effort to review the rules on research on human subjects, noting that DBASSE will release a summary of a March workshop this July and that an enlarged committee is now beginning work on a consensus report.

Among those testifying was Felice Levine, Executive Director of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), a COSSA member. In her statement on public access to federally supported research and development data, she urged "OSTP and related agencies to develop macro-level plans that not only require data management and sharing from grantees, but also more broadly take steps and allocate resources to foster and facilitate a culture of data sharing and use." Noting that data sharing and responsible data use were specified in the AERA Code of Ethics, she emphasized the importance of allowing for data sharing of confidential data under restricted access conditions consistent with consent agreements and privacy protection.

Levine also cited AERA's data sharing initiative undertaken by the AERA Grants Program in collaboration with the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Made possible by support from the National Science Foundation, she said this project fosters data use and also appropriate citation of data to credit scholars who produce these valuable products.

She also referenced, the NRC report *Sharing Research Data* (1985), which noted that secondary analysis of extant data is essential to verification, replication, and new discoveries in science. At that time, Levine noted, the NRC recommended various stakeholders, including federal agencies and scientific societies, devise policies and plans for enhancing data sharing and use. One such early effort, Levine cited, occurred in 1987 when the then NSF Division of Social and Economic Science required grantees to commit to data sharing and archiving plans. This led in 1989 to NSF instituting a broad, agency-wide policy on data access and sharing. Since 2000 alone, Levine remarked, the NRC has produced more than a dozen reports on expanding access to data and encouraging quality use consonant with protecting privacy and confidentiality. In addition, ICPSR, now over 50 years old, has led innovations in access to useful data (including new forms of data), data preservation, appropriate use of confidential data, and data citation, she testified.

Jared Lyle represented the ICPSR to deliver its testimony. Citing its over 50 years of experience as a data archive, Lyle noted that "maximizing public access to research data requires significant planning and foresight," and "standards and guidelines are available to help." These include making them discoverable. Finding and accessing data requires metadata ("data about data"), Lyle testified, in standard, machine actionable form so that search engines can find and catalog data, as well enable researchers to perform detailed searches across data collections. In the social sciences, Lyle pointed out, the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) is an international standard for the description of data. Data should also be usable and meaningful, which incurs adding descriptive labels, correcting coding errors, gathering documentation, and standardizing the final versions of files. Lyle also declared that "valuable research data deserve safekeeping for future researchers for replication and reuse." Data consumers also need to trust that the data they receive is the original, unaltered version saved by the producer, he said. Finally, "properly citing data encourages the replication of scientific results, improves research standards, guarantees persistent reference, and gives proper credit to data producers," Lyle concluded.

Another witness was Micah Altman of MIT representing the Data Preservation Alliance for the Social Sciences (Data-PASS), which is a broad-based voluntary partnership of data archives dedicated to acquiring, cataloging, and preserving social science data, and to developing and advocating best practices in digital preservation. Altman remarked that "Data sharing needs to be built into the research and publication workflow and not treated as a supplemental activity to be performed after the research project has been largely completed." He further argued that "ensuring long-term access to data requires a multi-institutional approach." He noted that "many threats to long-term access can be effectively ameliorated only when collections are replicated, geographically distributed, and audited by independent institutions."

The complete testimony is available at:

http://sites.nationalacademies.org/xpedio/groups/dbassesite/documents/webpage/dbasse_083132.pdf.

NCHS Board of Scientific Counselors Meets

The National Center for Health Statistics' (NCHS) Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC) held its first meeting of 2013 on May 6 and 7. The BSC is "charged with providing advice and making recommendations to the Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services; the Director, CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]; and the Director, NCHS, regarding the scientific and technical program goals and objectives, strategies, and priorities of the National Center for Health Statistics." Raynard Kington, President of Grinnell College and former Deputy Director of NIH, chairs the BSC. NCHS' Acting Director is Charlie Rothwell.

Health Indicators Warehouse

James M. Craver, NCHS Office of Analysis and Epidemiology, gave an introduction to the [Health Indicators Warehouse](#) (HIW), an online repository of approximately 1,200 unique health indicators from more than 160 sources across the federal and state governments, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations, including data from the Census; Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS); the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Education, and Agriculture; the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS); and the American Medical Association (AMA) and American Heart Association (AHA). Maintained by NCHS, the HIW is a flagship HHS open government initiative (see story above). The objectives of the HIW are to "enhance understanding of health and health care system performance in communities" and to "spark and facilitate action to improve performance and value." Craver acknowledged some of the challenges in creating such a wide-ranging clearinghouse, including deciding among the many actual and potential data sources, assessing the varying rigor of the sources, comparability issues, a lack of high-quality community-level data, and redundancies across indicators. Currently, the HIW features national, state, and local level indicators; graphs and maps of indicators when possible; links from the indicators to evidence-based interventions; and accessibility for developers. Craver cautioned that the HIW is not designed to be an analytical tool that allows users to manipulate the data; instead, it directs researchers to where they can get the data from the original source.

2010 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Alternative Questionnaire Experiment

Nicholas Jones, Roberto Ramirez, and Joan Hill, U.S. Census Bureau, shared the results of the 2010 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE). The AQE was created to test different designs of the Census race and Hispanic Origin question with the goals of increasing reporting in line with standard Office of Management and Budget (OMB) race and ethnic categories (race: White, Black, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino, Not Hispanic or Latino), lower the non-response level, improve accuracy and reliability of reporting, and elicit reporting of more detailed racial and ethnic groups (e.g., German, Korean, Mexican, etc.). The experiment was conducted in three phases: Census forms that included the experimental questions were sent out to 500,000

households; one in five of those households were re-interviewed to assess the relative accuracy of the questionnaires; and focus groups in 26 cities were conducted to better understand how and why people identify their race and ethnicity in different ways.

The experimental questionnaires consisted of 15 different versions. One major change being tested was the effectiveness of keeping the question on race separate from the one on Hispanic origin (the "separate question" model, the approach taken in past Census questionnaires) as opposed to combining them into one question (the "combined question" approach). In the combined question model, respondents are asked to provide race or origin and given choices for White, Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or other. This model also provides space under each option for respondents to write in more detailed information (such as German or Nigerian). The rate of non-responses to the questions dropped significantly for the combined question format. The size of the "other race" category also dropped significantly in the combined question format (it was one of the larger categories from the separate question approach). Results from the focus groups suggested that respondents preferred what they saw as the fair or equitable treatment of groups in the combined question format. Many respondents also desired a separate category for "Middle Eastern, North African, or Arab."

The presenters recommended further testing and refining of both the combined and separate question models and continued research on the optimal use of examples for each race and origin categories. New Census Bureau priority research projects will focus on analyzing race reporting among Hispanics in the combined approach, improving the reporting of detailed race and origin groups in the combined approach, and enhancing the separate question approach.

Some BSC members expressed concern that moving to the combined question approach would render older data incompatible and make analysis of long-term trends extremely difficult. In addition, because other federal statistical efforts tend to follow the lead of the Census Bureau, changing these questions could prove disruptive to data collection efforts across federal agencies. They argued that the Bureau must not simply prove that the new approach is as good as the old one, but instead must make the case that it is significantly better, in order to warrant the disruption.

International Health Activities

Sam Notzon, NCHS International Statistics Program, discussed NCHS' efforts to promote international comparability of health data. Noting that a recent National Academy of Sciences report, *Shorter Lives, Poorer Health*, recommended that NCHS work with international partners to improve data quality and consistency to enable accurate cross-national comparisons, Notzon argued that, in fact, NCHS had done a lot of work already to advance this goal. NCHS coordinates and supplies data on behalf of the U.S. to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). OECD's membership consists mainly of industrialized and emerging nations, making it useful for U.S. comparisons. NCHS supplies both outcome and quality data to OECD's health database and is a member of many of its Health Care Quality subcommittees. Former NCHS Director Ed Sondik chairs the OECD Health Care Quality Indicators Working Group. Notzon noted that sometimes when comparability issues exist, it is because the U.S. provides more rigorous data than other contributing countries (for example, providing objectively measured data for body mass, rather than self-reported data).

NCHS also participates in the World Health Organization (WHO) Family of International Classifications (WHO-FIC) Collaborating Center, the United Nations Washington Group on Disability Statistics, and International Collaborative Efforts (ICEs) to improve data on perinatal and infant mortality, aging statistics, injury statistics, and automation of mortality statistics. In addition, NCHS is a member of the International Group for Indigenous Health Measurement and collaborates with Canada in annual meetings to share ideas and discuss data issues. The Joint Canada-U.S. Health Survey (JCHUSH) is a model of data comparability.

Jennifer Madans, NCHS, discussed her work with international initiatives in the measurement of health state and disability. The UN Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG) was established

in 2001 to address the need for population-based measures of disability and to develop principles and standard forms for global indicators of disability. The WG aims to foster international cooperation in the area of health and disability statistics, untangle the web of confusing and conflicting disability estimates, develop a short set of general disability measures, develop extended sets of items to measure disability on population surveys, address methodological issues, and produce internationally tested measures to monitor the status of disabled populations. WG representatives span national statistical agencies from 118 countries and territories. The WG collaborated with UNICEF as part of a Workgroup on Child Functioning and Disability to develop and test questions on functioning and disability in children. These collaborations have produced disability measures, the beginnings of an infrastructure for disability data, and comparable testing methodology.

Kathryn Porter, NCHS Division of Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (DHANES), explained how NCHS' National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) has become the gold standard for health examination surveys internationally. DHANES has been consulted in planning such surveys in Germany, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, the UK, Israel, France, the EU, Canada, and South Korea. She noted that while many countries follow the NHANES model, they have adapted their own surveys to best suit their cultural needs. For example, some countries (like Canada and South Korea) conduct the surveys in trailers, as the U.S. does, while others conduct examinations in households (the UK) or clinics (Germany). In addition, different countries collaborate with different kinds of local partners to conduct the surveys.

National Death Index Updates

Lillian Ingster, NCHS, gave an update on improvements to the National Death Index (NDI) and its collaboration with the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA). The NDI is a database of all deaths in the United States and includes data taken only from states death certificates. It currently covers 1979 to 2011 and is comprised of more than 70 million records (2.5 million added annually). Information in the NDI includes an individual's name, social security number, date of birth, gender, race, marital status, state of residence, and state of birth. Records in the NDI are only used for health and medical research and are kept highly confidential.

Due to recent attention focused on the prevalence of veteran suicide, the DOD and the VA have been tasked with assessing the magnitude of the problem and developing ways to reduce the number of military suicide deaths. The Departments have collaborated with the NDI to create a DOD/VA Mortality Data Repository, which will be a combined file of all DOD and VA records matched against the NDI (around 26 million records). The data will be initially used to research suicide, but over time other health research topics will be examined. The collaboration will allow NCHS to flag NDI mortality records with veteran status. In addition, the NDI will receive out-of-country military death records from DOD and VA dating back to the Korean War, to be updated monthly (currently the NDI does not have records on out-of-country deaths). These records will be able to assist states in flagging birth records as deceased and preventing identity theft, as out-of-country deaths are often targeted for abuse.

NHANES Updates

Porter discussed some of the new projects currently underway to improve NHANES. Due to increased focus on decreasing sodium consumption, one of CDC Director Tom Frieden's "Winnable Battles," NHANES has become interested in collecting information about sodium levels. This spring, NHANES undertook a pilot study to determine the feasibility of collecting a 24-hour urine sample from participants, which is considered the best way to measure sodium intake. The study asks participants to collect their urine for a full 24 hours. Results are currently analyzed to determine how well participants were able to comply with instructions. A determination will be made in June if 24-hour urine collection will be part of NHANES 2014. The Health Measures at Home Study (HMHS) was conducted to assess the feasibility of collecting physical measures in people's homes. This would enable NCHS to add physical measures to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and could lead to collecting timelier and better data. The measures collected were dried blood

spots, height, weight, and blood pressure. The results will be reported in an upcoming National Health Statistics Report and journal articles. Porter also gave an update on the NHANES DNA Data Bank, noting that the remarkable progress in genetic technology has outpaced our ability to manage research results and obtain appropriate consent for use of genetic information. As such, NHANES is developing a new plan of operation for making genetic information available for research. In the fall of 2013, NHANES plans to convene a National Academy of Sciences workshop on "Guidelines for Returning Individual Results from Genome Research Using Population-Banked Specimens."

New NCHS Reports: Health Behavior of Adults and Teen Birth Rates

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) released a Vital and Health Statistics report on [Health Behaviors of Adults: 2008-2010](#). The report, which is based on data collected as part of the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), presents prevalence estimates for key health behaviors--alcohol use, cigarette smoking, leisure-time physical activity, body mass index, and sleep. Among the findings:

- About 6 in 10 U.S. adults were current drinkers; about 1 in 5 adults were lifetime abstainers.
- About one in five adults were current smokers and over one-half of adults had never smoked cigarettes. Less than one-half of current smokers attempted to quit smoking in the past year.
- Nearly one-half of adults met the federal guidelines for aerobic physical activity, about one-quarter of adults met the federal guidelines for muscle-strengthening physical activity, and about one in five adults met both guidelines.
- About 6 in 10 adults were overweight or obese.
- About 7 in 10 adults got sufficient sleep.

NCHS also released a Data Brief on [Declines in State Teen Birth Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin](#), based on data collected as part of the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS). The report finds that teen birth rates fell at least 15 percent for all but two states during 2007-2011; rates fell 30 percent or more in seven states. Declines in birth rates were steepest among Hispanic teenagers.

AHRQ Releases 2012 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has released its 10th [National Healthcare Quality Report](#) (NHQR) and [National Healthcare Disparities Report](#) (NHDR). The NHQR focuses on "national trends in the quality of health care provided to the American people," and the NHDR focuses on "prevailing disparities in health care delivery as it relates to racial factors and socioeconomic factors in priority populations." The reports find:

Health care quality and access are suboptimal, especially for minority and low-income groups.

- On average, 26 percent of Americans reported barriers that restricted their access to care.
- On average, Americans failed to receive 30 percent of the care they needed to treat or prevent particular medical conditions.
- Disparities in quality of care are common: Blacks received worse care than Whites, and Hispanics received worse care than non-Hispanic Whites. Poor and low-income people received worse care than high-income people.
- Disparities in access are also common, especially among American Indian or Alaska Natives, Hispanics, and poor people.

Overall quality is improving, access is getting worse, and disparities are not improving.

- Quality is improving slowly for all racial, ethnic, and income groups.

- Access is getting worse for most racial, ethnic, and income groups.
- Few disparities in quality of care are improving.
- Almost no disparities in access to care are improving.

In order to reduce health disparities, there is still a need to increase the availability and quality of data collected and reported on racial and ethnic minorities.

- Data on disparities continue to improve but are still suboptimal.

Urgent attention is warranted to ensure improvement in quality and success in reducing disparities.

- Measures of acute treatment are improving; other measures are lagging.
- Quality changes unevenly across measures.
- Disparities also change unevenly across measures.

Congressional Briefing on Social Science Research on Disasters

The nation and the world have been victims of disasters, both natural and man-made. From earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, super storms, and tornados to terrorist attacks and forest fires, these disasters have created human suffering and misery as well as property damage.

On April 25, COSSA, in conjunction with the House Research and Development (R&D) Caucus and the Coalition for National Science Funding, presented a congressional briefing on *Social Science Research on Disasters: Communication, Resilience, and Consequences*. The briefing highlighted the research, much of it supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), social and behavioral scientists have conducted examining these issues. A standing-room crowd of 95 people attended.

After introductory remarks by NSF Director Cora Marrett extolling the importance of social and behavioral science research and House R&D Co-Chairman Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) noting the role Congress can play to support science and technology, three distinguished scientists presented findings from their work.



From left: COSSA's Howard Silver, Elizabeth Frankenberg, Roxane Cohen Silver, Cora Marrett, H. Dan O'Hair

H. Dan O'Hair, Dean of the College of Communication at the University of Kentucky, discussed his research on risk communication. He first reported on his studies of hurricane warnings. O'Hair wanted to examine how extreme events, media, and message strategies interact to affect human decision making. The linear dissemination message model of a primary source, intermediate receivers, and ultimate receivers does not exist anymore. There are multiple sources, especially with the adoption of new technology, he noted. Using structured interviews with forecasters, emergency managers, and broadcast meteorologists in Houston and Galveston, TX, O'Hair discovered that each had a different concern. The broadcasters are concerned with timeliness and rapid dissemination and are viewed as willing to sensationalize the event. The forecasters are concerned with accuracy and are willing to sacrifice deadlines, thereby frustrating both managers and broadcasters. The managers fear becoming responsible for incorrect or premature messages, particularly about evacuation decisions. O'Hair also discovered that evacuation decisions are not just about public health and safety, but there is sometimes concern about economic consequences. What O'Hair called "boundary spanning," collaboration among these actors is often missed in these events, creating chaotic situations.

In two studies on message receivers, O'Hair examined the effect of perceptions associated with warning message components. Again using Houston as a test case, he found that receivers relied mostly on the National Hurricane Center and friends and family for information in a hurricane situation. In order to increase attention to warning messages, it is important, O'Hair commented, to get people aroused. This occurs, he said, by communicating the severity of the impending storm and works best with people who have experienced severe weather previously.

Finally, O'Hair discussed an Innovation Corps NSF grant he received to learn how to commercialize his research. His entrepreneurial mentors at Stanford decided that he should talk to hospitals to inform them of how to apply his research to hospital discharge messaging, which O'Hair has pursued with some success.

Collective Trauma and Resilience

Roxane Cohen Silver, Professor of Psychology and Social Behavior at the University of California, Irvine, addressed the issue of ensuring population resilience from collective traumas. After 30 years of studying traumatic life events from the shootings at Columbine to Southern California firestorms to the September 11 attacks, she noted that these events are random, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and, if a community-based event, a shared experience among many victims. Common responses include shock, disbelief, emotional numbness, generalized distress, decreased positive affect and psychological well-being, psychopathological disorders, survivor guilt, ongoing memories of the event, sleep disturbances, disorganized thoughts, disruptions in functioning, somatic symptoms, changes in personal values, a desire to be with close friends and family, and positive community effects, such as social cohesion and increased voluntarism.

Silver pointed out that there are myths associated with coping with these events, such as: psychological responses are predictable with universal reactions; emotional responses follow a pattern or orderly sequences of stages; psychological responses will be limited to those directly exposed to the trauma; and the degree of emotional response will be proportional to the degree of exposure.

One predictor of vulnerability to trauma is repeated exposure to the trauma, particularly graphic images in the media such as the planes crashing into the two towers. She showed a number of signs telling the media to stay away from areas where traumatic events occurred, for example after the shooting rampage at Virginia Tech.

Resilience occurs, Silver noted, when there is prior experience coping with stressful events, which creates an inoculation effect. If there is strong pre-existing community support via strong social institutions, for example, faith-based alliances, resilience will occur. If there is confidence in the authorities to deal with the event, resilience will occur. However, the authorities have to provide

consistent messages, work to minimize community conflict, do not assume the public will panic, and enlist the media as allies not adversaries. After speaking at the COSSA event, Silver left to go to Boston to begin research, with NSF support, on the community's response to the Boston Marathon bombing.

Consequences of a Disaster

Elizabeth Frankenberg, Professor at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, examined the response to the day-after-Christmas 2004 Sumatra-Andaman earthquake and the tsunami it engendered that destroyed a large portion of Aceh province, Indonesia. The impact on Aceh included the destruction of property estimated at \$4.5 billion U.S. dollars, the death of roughly five percent of the province's population, around 160,000 people, and the displacement of more than 700,000 survivors. Yet, by 2007 with support from around the world, the largest reconstruction effort ever in a developing country was occurring.

The study she and her colleagues conducted focused on knowing the affected population before the event, comparing individuals from affected areas with those in unaffected areas, measuring multiple dimensions of people's lives, their families, and their communities, and following them over time. The study concluded that recovery takes years, not months, that vulnerability is multi-dimensional and dynamic, and that more effective targeting of assistance could improve the pace and extent of recovery.

It took six years to rebuild housing to the pre-tsunami levels. One dimension of the survivors is that they were overwhelmingly male. Frankenberg explained that this was due to the inability of many of the women to swim. Older male orphans (1 in 6 children 10 to 18 years of age lost parent(s)) were less likely to be in school, while older female orphans were more likely to be keeping house. Five years later the male orphans were likely working and the females were likely to be married. Orphaned children 5 to 14 received scholarships to help them return to school.

Frankenberg concluded that targeting assistance is more complicated for programs aimed at human capital outcomes than at infrastructure replacement. It is easier to rebuild homes than people's lives. Although the pace of rebuilding is slow, it can ultimately succeed. Finally, high mortality disasters change family compositions and can hasten the transition to adulthood for many children.

For a video of the briefing and the presentation slides please visit the COSSA web page, www.cossa.org.

IOM and NRC Panel Meets to Help Set an Agenda for Public Health Research on Firearm-Related Violence

With President Obama's Executive Order allowing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to once again support research on the public health aspects of gun violence, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academies has appointed a committee to help set priorities for that research.

The panel, chaired by AAAS Chief Executive Officer Alan Leshner, includes Carnegie Mellon criminologist and former COSSA President Al Blumstein and Florida State criminologist Gary Kleck, but mostly consists of scholars and practitioners from the public health arena. It held a workshop on April 23 in Washington, DC a few days after the Senate rejected legislation to impose some restrictions on gun sales and firearms in the United States.

The charge for the panel is to identify "the most critical research questions that can be answered in the short-term (within a three year time frame)." The goal is to "improve knowledge of the causes of gun violence, the interventions that prevent gun violence, and strategies to minimize the public health burden of gun violence."

The first meeting, according to Leshner's introductory remarks, was an "information gathering" session. Speakers represented not only researchers and public health practitioners, but representatives of various groups like the Independent Firearm Owners Association, the National Rifle Association, and the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

Richard Feldman of the Independent Firearm Owners Association reminded the panel of the "reality of the political situation" when it came to guns. He noted that 120 million Americans own approximately 300 million guns. He indicated that "gun control" was not going to work. He recommended focusing on gun violence reduction which would include strategies to teach gun safety, locate people with mental health problems "before they snap," and "encouraging citizens to do the right thing." He also indicated that it was a mistake to look to elected officials for leadership on this issue.

Philip Cook of Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy told the panel that there are enormous deficits in our knowledge. Earlier attempts to survey gun owners have yielded very low response rates, he remarked, but an updated effort could be useful. There were some natural experiments available as 15 states have enacted background checks on handguns and this policy sorely needs evaluation studies, Cook contended. At the same time, John Fraser of the NRA-IL Research and Information Division called for evaluations of the effects of right-to-carry laws in place in 41 states. He also expressed support for more inmate surveys to determine the deterrent effect of gun laws.

Keith Hotle of the Wyoming Department of Health discussed the use of guns in suicides. He pointed out that as contrasted with other methods, suicide attempts with guns succeed 91 percent of the time. He called for more studies of intervention strategies particularly with regard to risk/protective factors. He was particularly concerned with returning veterans.

Nina Vinik, the program director for Gun Violence Prevention at the Joyce Foundation, called for research "that is attainable." Echoing Cook, she said there are natural experiments in the variations in state laws. She recommended studies of the risks and benefits of having guns in your home and of carrying them in public. She also suggested examining the use of firearms in domestic violence.

Daniel Webster of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health noted that there are plenty of data collected by CDC and other agencies on child maltreatment, date violence, sexual assaults, elder abuse, suicide, youth violence, as well as the Violent Death Reporting system, that are available for analysis. One glaring gap, Webster declared, was determining how guns get into the hands of the wrong people.

Acting National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Director Greg Ridgway told the panel that his agency has supported research on violence, including gun-related homicides. These have included Project Safe Neighborhoods; Project Ceasefire in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Newark; and an analysis of the value of firearms trace data. He discussed the NIJ's work with the Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission, which suggested that the past explanation of violence resulting from wars over drug turf were not necessarily true anymore. The Milwaukee study suggested that 60 percent of the homicides resulted from disputes that were linked to some form of "disrespect." He also informed the committee that NIJ's technology division was supporting research exploring improvements in ballistic evidence and in gun safety technology.

The workshop then moved into breakout groups that included sessions on: characteristics of gun violence, intervention research priorities, technology research priorities, the role of video games and other media (which included Brad Bushman, co-chair of the committee that produced the report on Youth Violence for Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA)), and risk and protective factors (which included socio-economic environment and socio-cultural environment issues).

William Julius Wilson, Harvard Scholar and Former COSSA President, Awarded Moynihan Prize



William Julius Wilson, the Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor at Harvard University and a former President of COSSA, was the 2013 winner of the Daniel P. Moynihan Prize awarded by the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences (AAPSS), a COSSA member. He received the prize at a dinner in Washington, DC on May 9.

The prize, named for the former Senator from New York, is given to a leading policymaker, social scientist, or public intellectual whose career "demonstrates the value of using social science evidence to advance the public good." Previous winners have included Alice Rivlin, Diane Ravitch, David Ellwood, Robert Greenstein, and Paul Volcker.

Wilson, who has also won the National Medal of Science and was named a MacArthur Prize Fellow, has a distinguished career researching, writing, and speaking about the connection among concentrated poverty, work opportunities, and race. His most famous work, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, recently celebrated 25 years since publication (AAPSS held a symposium and published a special issue of its journal, *The Annals*, about the book's legacy.)

Earlier in the day, Wilson delivered the inaugural Daniel P. Moynihan lecture in which he called on policymakers to develop comprehensive policies that address the resources available in poor neighborhoods. Without this approach the structural unemployment that plagues the nation cannot be effectively reduced, Wilson asserted.

Wilson declared that black and Latino workers face diminished wages and job instability because of the changing structure of the U.S. labor market. Those workers, who previously held jobs in occupations, mostly in manufacturing, that provided a living wage now face reduced working hours, stagnant or declining pay, and during recessions, permanent layoffs. The employment prospects of these workers are further diminished, Wilson proclaimed, "because of their concentrations in neighborhoods with a weak, insufficient infrastructure and enrollment in failing public schools."

Referencing one of Moynihan's most famous publications, his report on the black family issued in 1965, Wilson acknowledged that the former Senator had made an important case for addressing the cultural factors affecting black economic and social prospects. Thus, Wilson called for an approach that would address both cultural and structural factors affecting the "insidious segregation" that black and Latino people face. He advocated for a "Schools and Jobs initiative" that would help "fill the gap" that hinders minority workers from acquiring or reconnecting with jobs.

He expressed some pessimism that in the current political climate such an initiative could become a reality, especially with Republicans controlling the House of Representatives. Nonetheless, Wilson stressed that he continues to raise these issues "for much of the same reasons that Sen. Moynihan so fervently pushed for a national family policy in the 1960s despite the considerable backlash he experienced." "Without coordinated, deliberative intervention at the policy level, the outlook for the economic future of the poor and working-class blacks and Latinos is very bleak indeed," Wilson concluded.

In addition to the Moynihan Prize, the AAPSS anointed four distinguished social scientists as Academy Fellows. They are:

Samuel Stouffer Fellow: Norman Bradburn, a social psychologist whose work has focused on psychological well-being and assessments of quality of life, particularly through the use of large-scale surveys. He is the Tiffany and Margaret Blake Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, Senior Fellow of the National Opinion Research Center, and a former Assistant Director for the National Science Foundation's Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences directorate.

John Kenneth Galbraith Fellow: David Card, a labor economist whose work has illuminated

virtually all areas of that field and understandings of the economy writ large. He is the Class of 1950 Professor of Economics at the University of California-Berkeley and Director of the Labor Studies Program at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER).

Harold Lasswell Fellow: **Elizabeth Garrett**, a scholar in law and politics who has done extensive work on direct democracy, tax and welfare reform, and statutory interpretation. She is a former clerk to Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and is currently Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Southern California.

Ernest W. Burgess Fellow: **Robert Hauser**, a sociologist who has done wide-ranging research on social stratification, aging, and social statistics. He is Executive Director of the National Research Council's Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education and was formerly the Vilas Research Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Commerce Secretary Blank Helps IWPR Celebrate 25th Anniversary

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), a COSSA member, was founded in 1987 by its director Heidi Hartmann "out of a need for an organization whose distinct purpose was to develop comprehensive, women-focused, policy-oriented research." On May 22nd, IWPR held a celebration of its 25 years of "informing policy, inspiring change, and improving lives."

An afternoon of congratulations and presentations that included Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Gwen Moore (D-WI), and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), culminated in a keynote talk by Acting Secretary of Commerce Rebecca Blank. Blank will soon leave the Department to become the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin, Madison on July 22. President Obama has nominated businesswoman Penny Pritzker as her replacement.



Heidi Hartmann



Rebecca Blank

Addressing the crowd on the topic of "Empowering Women in the Economy," Blank reviewed women's progress over the past 25 years in education, labor markets, and society. She noted the "substantial improvement" in women's educational achievement in the past forty years. This is particularly true among younger women who are graduating college in larger numbers than men and who are moving on to obtain more graduate and professional degrees. Blank expressed concern about the social implications of this growing discrepancy in educational attainment between the sexes. It will continue to affect marriage choices and fertility rates, she suggested.

Despite the growing gap in education, the labor market situation has not improved as much. Blank attributed this to the continuing employment of women in "traditional" jobs and their lack of interest in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields, which lead to higher paying work. She noted that this appears to be an American phenomenon, since in Europe and Asia women enter STEM fields in a similar proportion to men.

She also described that at entry level jobs, women and men have reached pay equality. However, she asserted men still get promoted more rapidly and thus the pay disparities grow. Despite advances, the glass ceiling still exists as only four percent of corporate CEOs are female. Women, she said, are still hindered by lack of flexible schedules, less feedback from supervisors, and their seeming timidity in bargaining for higher pay. The lack of female entrepreneurship remains another factor in the continuing pay disparity, according to the Acting Secretary. Even those businesses that are led by women are smaller firms with very few employees, she remarked.

Blank then discussed how women's role in society has certainly changed in the past 25 years.

Women are marrying later and having children later. One consequence of these decisions is that they are having fewer children. Many more are living singly both as young women and later in life as widows. All this has changed in a relatively short period of time, Blank declared. Yet, she remarked that women who work outside the home still do most of the work inside the home.

The Secretary's advice to those women who "want to have it all" was to "find a good partner," who will share your aspirations, share the child rearing, and share the housework.

Coalition for National Science Funding Holds Annual Exhibition: Social/Behavioral Sciences Well Represented

On May 7, the Coalition for National Science Funding held its 19th Annual Exhibition showcasing scientific research supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Over 285 people attended, including ten members of Congress and numerous congressional staff. The members in attendance were: Reps. Howard Coble (R-NC), Chaka Fattah (D-PA), Bill Foster (D-IL), Rush Holt (D-NJ), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Walter Jones (R-NC), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Jerry McNerney (D-CA), David Price (D-NC), and Paul Tonko (D-NY).

The members of COSSA were well-represented among the 35 exhibits. The groups, their scientists, and their topics, included:

American Economic Association, *Improving Markets with Laboratory Experiments*, Douglas Davis, Virginia Commonwealth University;

American Political Science Association, *Better Ballot Design*, Martha Kropf, University of North Carolina, Charlotte;

American Psychological Association, *Psychological Science: Helping Law Enforcement Improve Eyewitness Reliability*, Margaret Bull Kovera, John Jay College of Criminal Justice;

American Sociological Association, *Infrastructure and Interdisciplinary Identity*, Stephen Zehr, University of Southern Indiana;

American Statistical Association, *Understanding Neural Networks through Statistics*, Genevera Allen, Rice University;

Linguistic Society of America, *Seeing & Believing: Societal Impacts of Language Science*, Jeffrey Lidz, University of Maryland, and Laura Ann Petitto, Gallaudet University;

National Communication Association, *Mapping Cyberspace to Realspace*, Brian Spitzberg, San Diego State University;

Population Association of America, *The Luxembourg Income Study*, Janet Gornick, City University of New York; and

Society for Research in Child Development, *Developing Early Interest and Skill in STEM*, David Uttal, Northwestern University and Catherine Haden, Loyola University.

Additional NSF-funded projects in the social and behavioral sciences were presented by:

Federation of Associations in Behavioral & Brain Sciences, *Development of Brain Regions for Theory of Mind*, Rebecca Saxe, Massachusetts Institute of Technology;

Michigan State University, *Evidence Based Curriculum Reform: Development and Assessment*, Melanie Cooper, Sonia Underwood and Nicole Baker; and

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Address all inquiries to COSSA at newsletters@cossa.org Telephone: (202) 842-3525

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