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# COSSA Washington Update

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## INTRODUCTION

As Congress takes two weeks off for the Easter/Passover recess, the headlines continue to focus on the Supplemental Appropriations bill for funding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the replacement of U.S. Attorneys. In the meantime, Congress also maintains its routines of examining the FY 2008 proposed budgets of government agencies. With the Democrats takeover of the legislative branch, the hearings have been longer, more detailed, and given some of the proposals, difficult for Administration appointees. The following stories reflect the ongoing work of the Congress, behind the headlines.

In addition, the National Academies' remains a place for experts to assess various facets of government activities and scientific dilemmas. This issue also includes a look at two recently released reports. The first evaluates the Education Department's international education and foreign language programs. The second looks at the need to protect privacy and confidentiality in the age of spatial technology.

## ZERHOUNI APPEARS BEFORE SENATE APPROPRIATORS; NIH'S SUCCESS RATE IS 'DISCOURAGING NEW GENERATIONS' OF SCIENTISTS

On March 19 and 26 (see related story below), the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee led by Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Arlen Specter (R-PA), Chair and Ranking Member, respectively, held the first two of six planned hearings to discuss the budget of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This

represents a departure from the Senate's recent practice of convening only one hearing for all of the 27 NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs).

At the March 19<sup>th</sup> hearing featuring NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, Harkin began by declaring that he and Specter "will not allow" the proposed budget cuts in the President's FY 2008 budget for NIH "to take place." Specter, likewise, maintained that he and Harkin "had to fight like tigers last year" to add a little over \$600 million to NIH's budget.

Reprising the testimony he gave to the House Appropriations Subcommittee, Zerhouni began by acknowledging that "there couldn't be more passionate supporters of science and research than both of you." He noted "their profound understanding of what makes science and what makes medical research work, why it is so important to the nation." Zerhouni thanked the subcommittee for the increase in funding provided in the NIH's FY 2007 budget, for "the focus" brought "toward supporting the next generation of scientists," and for making sure that the NIH does not become "stale" in its research." This focus has been instrumental in ensuring that the NIH's "momentum is kept in terms of new breakthroughs," the NIH director contended.

Responding to Specter's inquiry whether NIH research impacted the two-year decline in deaths due to cancer, Zerhouni acknowledged that it is "difficult" to figure out exactly why this has happened. "Most scientists look at this decrease and feel the main reason has been the decrease in smoking, behavioral change," he noted. "Social and behavioral science research have also contributed a great deal to epidemiology and prevention," he added. Citing the screening for colon cancer as an example, Zerhouni explained that NIH research's role includes the discovery that polyps are really "preemptable." That discovery is the result of "basic research conducted by NIH," he informed the Subcommittee. What would be "very meaningful" for Congress, Specter emphasized is for the NIH to "quantify" its role in the reduction in premature death, "as best we can."

Since "it is very important" to know that "what catches the attention of [his] colleagues [are] specifics," Specter requested that Zerhouni provide the Congress with an analysis of NIH's "best judgment as to what is happening with the decrease in funding . . . how many research projects are undertaken and how many you are turning away." The "President's budget is now more than \$500 million below last year, without considering an inflationary increase," Specter continued. What the Subcommittee would like to know is "what effect that is going to have on research."

He requested that Zerhouni provide them with three pieces of information: 1) his "best judgment as to what it would cost to cure cancer or as close as you can to that analysis;" 2) "what is going to happen to NIH if the budget is cut by more than \$500 million and if you take an inflationary factor of two percent, it is several billion dollars that is being cut; and 3) what would be done by way of prevention. He noted Zerhouni's "impressive" statistics of a 60 percent drop in mortality for heart disease and strokes for the second year in a row and asserted that when he again becomes chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Zerhouni will not have to provide "all these fancy statistics." But in the interim, the Congress needs "something really concrete" that can show "the priority status of health, . . . how much NIH means to promoting health, our greatest capital asset, and how much it means in reducing cost by preventing disease," he added.

Zerhouni responded that it is "hard to give an answer for any one disease," but he could show from his "standpoint as a science administrator that the "optimal point" is the NIH's ability to sustain research. Using success rates, Zerhouni noted that historically, the NIH has funded about three out of ten applications. It is the level at which the agency has gotten the return it wanted, he explained. Today, the agency funds two in ten. "I am concerned that 20 percent is too low, he maintained, adding that the 20 percent success rate is "straining" and "discouraging new generations" of scientists.

#### **'More Scientists Needed to Study the Complexity of Disease'**

According to Zerhouni, the current drop in the success rate is not just the result of flat funding. It is also the fact that "more scientists are needed to study the complexity of the diseases." Typically, NIH funds 1,500 new scientists a year. Last year that number dropped to 1,400, he informed the Subcommittee. At the same time, it is important that to sustain the number of new scientists funded each year "compromise or some decrease in other areas" is necessary, he explained.

That compromise includes giving up the ability to conduct clinical trials, which enables the NIH to "change the science and change the medicine" it supports. Harkin noted that NIH "has lost about 13 percent of its funding in real terms since the end of the doubling period in 2003." Advocates for NIH, he continued, have asked Congress to "get

NIH back on track by appropriating a 6.7 percent increase for the next three years. By fiscal year 2010, that would equal the amount that NIH would have attained if it had simply received inflationary increases." This year 6.7 percent is approximately \$1.9 billion. What do you think the NIH could accomplish with such an increase, what would be different, he asked?

Zerhouni replied that tradeoffs are necessary during flat budgets. NIH, according to the director, supports directly and indirectly, approximately 326,000 scientists in the U.S. Every year the budget goes below inflation rates, the agency has "to make some difficult choices which typically impact [its] ability to sustain scientists which are really the key to scientific progress." The first thing recovering the loss in purchasing power will do is to allow the NIH laboratories to recruit and retain the scientists needed to address the "very complex issues that have come to light from the scientific standpoint over the past few years." Another priority area would be a boost in the optimal success rate, Zerhouni argued, adding that he did not think that it was good to have success rates that are "persistently low."

Clarifying for Harkin the role of the NIH Common Fund, Zerhouni explained that the fund is about 1.5 percent of NIH's budget today. It is designed to coordinate and provide strategy for the future of science and fund areas that would not be otherwise receive money. "It is really to incubate novel ideas," he added. Zerhouni stated his preference that the Fund should not provide support for research on particular diseases. The diseases should gain support through the institutes that have the mission to serve that particular disease area. The common fund "is not to replace or a new source of funding for special diseases that don't find a home somewhere else," he maintained.

Harkin also inquired about public access to NIH-funded research. He noted that NIH has proposed that NIH-funded researchers should have to submit their final peer-reviewed papers to an NIH database after their acceptance by scientific journals and that the papers should be made available through the database within 12 months after their publication. What is the scientific value of increasing public access to this research, as you proposed, he asked. Why not six months? Why is it necessary for Congress to require NIH-funded researchers to adhere to this policy?

Responding, Zerhouni explained that "it is important in the information age that we are in, to make sure that publicly-funded research be available in a database that we can search and connect to all the many other databases that are available to us." It is also important not to damage peer review, he continued. But at the same time it is important to realize "that NIH needs to have the ability to do that without damaging journals." The agency proposes 12 months because it provides more flexibility. What NIH cannot be revoke, he insisted, is the proposal's "mandatory nature," since the voluntary approach has not worked. "I think we need to make this as a condition of federal fund granting; we need you to express that it is the wish of Congress that we accomplish it as easily as we can, he concluded.

## ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE CRITICAL TO PUBLIC POLICY

"The research you conduct is critical to public policy," Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), chair of the House Agriculture and Rural Development Appropriations Subcommittee, told Katherine Smith, Acting Administrator of the Economic Research Service (ERS), at a hearing on March 22. ERS is the provider of economic and social science information used by the general public and policymakers to understand and evaluate agricultural and rural policies. The hearing also made clear that this economic and social science information was important to keeping America competitive in agricultural markets and trade and to enhancing the well-being of rural Americans.

The hearing's focus was the demographic, economic, and social aspects of rural America. Smith informed the Subcommittee that in historic terms "Rural America is performing fairly well." Over the past forty years, "rural and urban economies have in many respects become more similar," Smith noted, citing data on poverty rates, unemployment, and homeownership. Yet, related Smith, the "overall data can be misleading" since "rural America is a collage of people and places" providing mixed results for different types of rural areas. In addition, "farming no longer anchors the rural economy as it did in the 1960s" as "the earnings of seven out of eight rural counties are now dominated by manufacturing, services, and other non-farm employment." In some rural counties tourism, recreation, and retirement communities have replaced agricultural products as the backbone for economic growth. Thus, Smith concluded that "the opportunities and challenges facing rural America are as varied as rural America itself."

DeLauro picked up on Smith's description of the unevenness of rural development. She expressed concern about the infrastructure problems including health services, housing, roads, educational opportunities, and community facilities. She indicated considerable interest in the 422 rural counties, containing about 17 percent of the nonmetro population, where the poverty rate still exceeded 20 percent. She stressed the importance of applying research on child development to develop human capital and community cohesion to develop, what Cornelia Flora of Iowa State has talked about, as social capital.

DeLauro also wondered about the impact Federal rural development programs were having on rural counties. Smith noted that ERS studies have found no correlation between the level of farm program payments to rural areas, and those areas' population growth/loss measures, either over time (growth patterns) or space. Members of the Subcommittee believe that increased economic growth in rural areas will occur from the increasing production of biofuels. Rep. Tom Latham (R-IA) indicated his excitement at the prospects for ethanol and cellulosic grasses, but also acknowledged the consequences for other parts of the rural economy and infrastructure, such as roads not built to handle heavy truck traffic and higher grain prices for livestock producers. DeLauro suggested that biofuels "changes everything" and asked if the proposed \$1 million in ERS' FY 2008 budget was enough to track these changes.

Smith suggested that rural economic growth could also come from attracting what George Mason University economist Richard Florida has called the "creative class" - high-tech, knowledge-based, often entrepreneurial talent. This would be hard for some areas of her district, Rep. Joanne Emerson (R-MO) remarked, because the low levels of educational achievement of her constituents, e.g. high-levels of non-high school graduates, would make it difficult to attract such talent. She argued for a holistic, regional approach to overcoming the dismal trends, while acknowledging the importance of the cultural milieu that makes some people risk-averse and unwilling to change. However, another dilemma faced by rural areas is keeping young people from leaving after they have obtained higher education. Smith cited recent data that indicate that in some places more education has not led to an exodus.

### Congress Expected to Thwart USDA Plans

Two days earlier, at a hearing before the same Subcommittee, officials from the Department of Agriculture's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) area made their annual appearance to discuss the FY 2008 proposed budget. REE Undersecretary Gale Buchanan made the Administration's case once again for taking funds from the Hatch Act formula program and using them for competitive, multi-state research programs. As in past years, members of the Subcommittee, particularly Latham, indicated that he thought Congress would not accept the dilution of formula funds in order to enhance competitive grants.

Buchanan highlighted the increases for "high priority research programs" such as bioenergy, genomics, animal and plant pests and diseases, food safety, nutrition, and the Census of Agriculture. Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CRSEES) Administrator Colien Hefferan testified that enhanced funding for the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants (NRI) program would help "identify factors that enhance the resiliency of rural communities and families impacted by disasters." These would include studies on the effects of communication networks, economic structure, governance, and family systems on the survival and speed of recovery. The discussion also included anti-obesity efforts by the Agricultural Research Service and ERS' expanded Market Analysis and Outlook program.

## PANEL EXAMINES HOMELAND SECURITY SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY BUDGET

Jay Cohen, the new Undersecretary for Science and Technology (S&T) at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), made his initial appearance before the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. David Price (D-NC) on March 28. Extremely cognizant of the Congress' unhappiness with the way S&T has functioned since DHS's formation, Cohen tried to reassure the panel that things are changing.

Cohen has reorganized the S&T Directorate into six divisions linked to three research investment portfolio directors that will support a broad and balanced range of activities "aimed at identifying, enabling and transitioning new capabilities to our customers to better protect the nation." The six divisions are: Explosives; Chemical/Biological; Command, Control & Interoperability; Borders and Maritime Security; Human Factors; and Infrastructure Protection and Geophysical. The three directors are for Research, Transition, and Innovation, which includes the Homeland Security Advanced Research Projects Agency (HSARPA).

The University Based Centers of Excellence, Cohen testified, will also reflect the new realignment, with each existing Center “strategically aligned” with at least one division, or to directorate-wide activities such as Operations Analysis and the Homeland Security Institute. The Undersecretary also related plans to establish new Centers in the areas of explosives detection, mitigation, and response; border security and immigration; maritime, island, and extreme/remote environmental security; and natural disasters, coastal infrastructure and emergency management.

Chairman Price suggested he was puzzled that with all the plans for the new Centers the FY 2008 request for University Programs declines by 21 percent from the FY 2007 level. Cohen explained that with the alignment of the Centers with the new divisions, budgets were reduced from \$4 million per existing Center to \$3 million. According to the Undersecretary, the current Centers would exist for six years, could re-compete once, and if successful receive DHS funds for 12 years. There was some confusion over the budgets for the new Centers, with the Subcommittee indicating they believed that these Centers would only receive \$1.5 million, rather than \$3 million. Cohen said he would clarify this discrepancy for the record.

Another concern was ensuring that DHS select the new Centers in a competitive process. Price raised the Southeast Regional Research Institute (SERRI), a DHS Center originally earmarked for Mississippi, but now run by Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and whether it was the presumptive winner of the new natural disaster center. Cohen assured the Chairman that the selection process would be competitive. However, the Undersecretary also said that he wanted “to morph” SERRI from an earmark into the regular program.

In addition, there was a discussion of the S&T Directorate’s scholarship and fellowship program. Cohen indicated that these too would become aligned with the Centers of Excellence and the six new divisions. The proposed FY 2008 budget would spend \$3.5 million of the \$14 million proposed for these awards to students from Minority Serving Institutions.

Rep. John Culberson (R-TX) also jumped on the competitive bidding bandwagon. Culberson, who is a strong advocate for the National Science Foundation, cited that agency’s peer review process as “the best.” Cohen, who is a former head of the Office of Naval Research, noted that agency’s use of project officer discretion as the basis for selecting projects and said it has worked extremely well. Culberson also pushed Cohen on S&T’s waste of funds and kept asking what have we got for the over \$7 billion appropriated to the Directorate since its creation.

Responding to Rep. John Peterson (R-PA), Cohen noted that the directorate has paid attention to National Academies’ reports to commit to research on hostile intent, psychology of terrorism, and the science of risk determination and its human element. This is in addition to the major focus on radiological, nuclear, biological, and chemical threats.

## SPENDING PANEL SCRUTINIZES JUSTICE OFFICES’ BUDGETS

Citing FBI Uniform Crime Reports’ data about rising crime the past two years, Rep. Alan Mollohan (D-WV), Chair of the House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee, asked witnesses from the Department of Justice, why the Bush Administration keeps reorganizing the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) and trying to cut or eliminate programs that help State and local law enforcement cope with crime.

Regina Schofield, Assistant Attorney General for OJP, Carl Peed, Director of the COPS Office, and Mary Beth Buchanan, Director of the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW), tried their best to defend the Administration’s FY 2008 budget proposals at the hearing held on March 27, but Members seemed skeptical.

Schofield argued that despite the last two years, crime rates remain “near historic lows,” particularly in large cities. She noted that conversely crime increases have occurred in medium to small-sized cities. With the reorganization the Administration is trying to provide “flexible, competitive, discretionary grants” to State and localities and “encourage multi-jurisdictional regional partnerships” to combat this increase, Schofield testified. Subcommittee members appeared unconvinced, with Chairman Mollohan suggesting that the Administration’s “real agenda was to cut domestic discretionary spending.” Rep. Harold Rogers (R-KY) also expressed concern about the changes in the programs.

Rep. David Price (D-NC), who chairs the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee (see related story), strongly argued that reductions in federal spending for State and local law enforcement raises the pressure on these “first responders” to terrorism and increases demands on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget. He

advocated more coordination between the OJP and DHS, which Schofield acknowledged does not happen now. She blamed it on DHS' dysfunctional organization.

Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA) inquired about crime prevention programs, particularly as it relates to gangs. Schofield cited mapping tools, "Helping America's Youth," a joint program between the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Weed and Seed program.

Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD) noted the 94 percent proposed cut in the COPS office and suggested to Peed that the Administration was seeking to eliminate the program, begun under President Clinton, which provided funds for community policing and the hiring of more police officers. Peed remarked that 81 percent of police departments had adopted some form of community policing, according to a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and perhaps it was time to move on.

#### **BJS Budget Adequate?**

Ranking Member Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) expressed concern about BJS and its funding needs. He wondered about the adequacy of BJS' FY 2008 budget for the data collections that are important to crime policy. Schofield noted the difficulties faced by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), another method of measuring increases or decreases in crime. She decried BJS' arrangement with the Census Bureau to collect the NCVS data and noted the decreasing quality of the information because of the reductions in sample size resulting from stagnant and declining budgets in recent years.

Citing testimony by former OJP Assistant Attorney General Laurie Robinson from a hearing held the previous week, Frelinghuysen asked about a "What Works Repository" that would provide a nationwide clearinghouse of evidence-based policy for consultation by State and local officials. Schofield responded that OJP has developed "lessons learned" and "best practices" activities for law enforcement.

Rep. Tom Latham (R-IA) asked about the gaps in research on domestic violence. Buchanan referred to a BJS report that indicated a decrease in intimate partner violence. She also told the panel that OVW is working with the Muskie Institute at the University of Southern Maine on data collection and analyses to compile a best practices database.

Buchanan further testified that the OVW was working hard to educate teens about the treatment of women to prevent date violence. As an example, she noted that OVW is working with the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention on a program called "Choose Respect." Schofield also noted that OVW would no longer fund OJP programs.

## **A CLOSER LOOK AT NIH FUNDING: TRANSLATING PROMISE INTO PROGRESS**

Chairman Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Member Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) of the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Subcommittee have long been champions boosting funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Restoring the Administration's proposed FY 2008 cuts is a major priority for the duo. They demonstrated a united front at a March 26 hearing centered on the FY 2008 budget for "Mind, Brains and Behavioral research at the NIH."

Nora Volkow, National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) director testified in what will be a series of upcoming briefings regarding NIH funding. Providing vividly illustrated before and after images of the brain and other vital organs, Volkow highlighted NIDA's recent scientific accomplishments and recounted future promise for the Institute. "We work toward a future in which early recognition of risk for addiction is no different than early recognition of other chronic medical diseases" declared Volkow. "Innovative use of imaging techniques allow scientist to design better treatments and more precisely judge their effectiveness, even prediction who would be most likely to benefit from selected therapies and who might be expected to relapse, so that preemptive interventions can be therapies applied."

Prevention and the ability to effectively diagnose disorders was a central theme among the five NIH Institutes present, including NIDCD, NIMH, and NINDS. "Prevention is a key focus of NIAAA (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)," according to its director, Ting-Kai Li. He revealed alcoholism prevention efforts focused on the early stages of life. "By altering harmful behavior we can significantly reduce the burden of illness due to alcohol." NIAAA supported research has clearly demonstrated that exposing alcohol to a developing embryo and fetus can produce alcohol-induced birth defects. As a result, the NIAAA supports research to develop effective outreach to

pregnant women, and to develop interventions to protect against injuries in the affected fetus and ameliorate deficits in the affected child. (See Update, [March 19, 2007](#))

According to Li, NIAAA's focus on addressing underlying mechanisms of change across all behavioral treatments results in better diagnosis and personalized treatment. The ability to facilitate individualized treatment is essential claims Li, referring to a recent study that suggested that Hispanics and Blacks with higher levels of problem severity were less likely to have used treatment services than Whites with problems of comparable severity. (See related story).

The National Institute on Neurological Disorders (NINDS) is beginning a process to update its strategic plan that will guide its mission and implementation. Story Landis, NINDS director, testified that in order to achieve the goal of reducing the burden of neurological disorders certain steps have to be taken. "We must certainly continue to support young scientists, to engage the ingenuity of the scientific and medical community, to work with the private sector, and to collaborate with other components of the NIH."

In 1999, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) collaborated with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to launch Wise Ears!, a national campaign to prevent noise-induced hearing loss in the general public, including the workplace. NIDCD Director James Battey spoke of the campaign's accomplishment and the potential for future collaborations.

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) director Thomas Insel also shared that through collaborative partnerships his Institute aims to accelerate its research discoveries. "Fifteen NIH Institutes investing in research on the nervous system have pooled resources to create the NIH Blueprint for Neuroscience Research, a framework to enhance collaboration in the development of research tools, resources, and training, all of which will be made available to the neuroscience research community," he declared.

## **SURGEON GENERAL WANTS TO END UNDERAGE DRINKING**

Aligned with its research efforts of examining alcohol across the lifespan, the NIAAA and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) declared March 6 a Call to Action against underage drinking. The U.S. Surgeon General's Office has identified six overarching goals to stop America's 11 million current underage drinkers from using alcohol, and to keep other young people from starting. The goals include: fostering changes in American society that facilitate healthy adolescent development; engaging parents, schools, communities, all levels of government, all social systems that interface with youth, and youth themselves; promoting an understanding of underage alcohol consumption in the context of human development and maturation that takes into account individual adolescent characteristics as well as environmental, ethnic, cultural, and gender differences; conducting additional research on adolescent alcohol use and its relationship to development; working to improve public health surveillance on underage drinking and on population-based risk factors for this behavior; and working to ensure that policies at all levels are consistent with the national goal.

Acting Surgeon General Kenneth Moritsugu laid out recommendations for government and school officials, parents, other adults and the young people. "Too many Americans consider underage drinking a rite of passage to adulthood," said Moritsugu. "Research shows that young people who start drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to have alcohol-related problems later in life. New research also indicates that alcohol may harm the developing adolescent brain. The availability of this research provides more reasons than ever before for parents and other adults to protect the health and safety of our nation's children."

Although there has been a significant decline in tobacco and illicit drug use among teens, underage drinking has remained at consistently high levels. The 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health estimates there are 11 million underage drinkers in the United States. Nearly 7.2 million are considered binge drinkers, typically meaning they drank more than five drinks on occasion, and more than two million are classified as heavy drinkers.

Is a *Call to Action enough?* During the March 26 hearing (see earlier story), Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) showed great concern about effective outreach to state and local communities to reverse the 'glamorization' of hazardous and underage alcohol consumption. In a collaborative effort, NIDA and NIAAA along with HBO came together to create an eye-opening documentary, entitled "Addiction" to help Americans understand addiction as a chronic yet treatable brain disease, and to spotlight promising scientific advancements.

## ACADEMY REPORT ASSESSES INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

In 2005 when the Congress first began its so-far uncompleted attempt to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, one of the major issues facing it were charges that the international education and foreign language programs of Title VI supported classes that demonstrated evidence of anti-American bias. Congress asked the National Academies to establish a panel to assess the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs that have been the cornerstone of higher education's efforts to provide support to professors and students to learn about overseas lands and languages since the Soviet's launch of Sputnik jolted America out of its complacency fifty years ago.

On March 27, the Academies' released its report: *International Education and Foreign Languages: Keys to Securing America's Future*. At a press conference, Committee Chair Janet Norwood, a former President of COSSA, was joined by committee members Ken Prewitt of Columbia University and Michael Lemmon of the National Defense University, to discuss the report's findings.

Although not specifically in the Committee's purview, Prewitt responded to a question about the anti-Americanism accusation by noting that the history of international education is filled with charges of political bias. "It is not new, and it won't go away," he said. However, the Committee found no collateral damage to the programs from any biases and the current allegations were "blown out of proportion."

Norwood summed up the main findings from the report. She called the programs "successful and useful" and indicated that the country was getting internationally educated people at a small cost, because the universities are able to leverage the money from the Education Department. However, the report also proclaims that the funding for the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs has not kept up with the expanding pace of their mission as world conditions have changed dramatically.

The report, Norwood commented, also concluded that the commitment of the Department of Education to these programs, in terms of staff, is "insufficient for the unprecedented demands the country faces." The Committee called for consolidating the Department's international and foreign language programs under a Senate confirmed, high level administrator.

Congress, the Committee determined, should also require the U.S. Secretary of Education to issue a biennial public report that outlines national needs, plans to tackle them, and progress towards goals in this arena. To produce the report, the Secretary should consult with the departments of State and Defense, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and other relevant agencies.

One of the Committee's difficulties, according to study director Mary Ellen O'Connell, was the lack of sufficient data systems tracking the programs. Therefore, the report recommends that universities cooperate with the Department of Education to develop performance indicators that would allow monitoring and improvement of the programs.

Lemmon discussed problems with learning foreign languages. The report calls for contracting out to find new ways, beyond oral proficiency, to measure foreign language abilities and how to use technology to improve language instruction.

Norwood also made clear that the importance of knowing about foreign cultures, economies, histories, and politics, and the ability to speak other languages besides English is critical to functioning in today's world. Prewitt also called on universities to "wake up" to the need to help society understand the internationalization taking place, not just through the social sciences and humanities, but across the curriculum.

Norwood concluded that the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs "are working," but "they can be better." The hope is that the report will galvanize Congress, the Education Department, and the universities to action.

The report is available at: [www.nap.edu/catalog/11841.html](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11841.html)



## PROTECTING PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY FOR LINKED SOCIAL AND SPATIAL DATA

Geographic information systems (GIS) and other new technologies enhance social scientists' ability to gain better understanding of human behavior in its physical and environmental contexts. However, spatially precise data raise the risk of identifying the people or organization to which the data apply. This might result in compromising confidentiality promises made to gain access to the data. With privacy becoming an important issue for those who are asked to respond to surveys, social scientists are assessing how to ensure protection of confidential answers.

The National Academies created a panel chaired by former COSSA President Myron Gutmann, director of the Interuniversity Consortium of Political and Social Research, a major social science data archive, to examine confidentiality issues arising from the integration of remotely sensed and self-identifying data. The panel has issued a report: *Putting People on the Map: Protecting Confidentiality with Linked Social-Spatial Data*.

The report concludes that "because technical strategies will not be sufficient in the foreseeable future for resolving the conflicting demands for data access, data quality, and confidentiality, institutional approaches will be required to balance those demands."

It also notes that: "Recent research on technical approaches for reducing the risk of identification and breach of confidentiality has demonstrated promise for future success." Yet, "at this time, however, no known technical strategy or combination of technical strategies for managing linked spatial-social data adequately resolves conflicts among the objectives of data linkage, open access, data quality, and confidentiality protection across datasets and data uses... procedures, such as transforming data or creating synthetic datasets still need more evaluation."

The report therefore recommends:

- 1) More research on technical and institutional ways to disseminate data and still protect confidentiality.
- 2) Train and educate researchers in the ethical use of data.
- 3) Those who use spatially explicit data should design their studies in ways so that data sharing can occur, but that confidentiality will have protection.
- 4) Institutional reviews boards should develop expertise to make well-informed decisions that balance the competing needs of researchers and their subjects.
- 5) Data enclaves should be developed to provide wider access to high-quality data. These would include "virtual enclaves." Meaningful penalties for misuse of data from these enclaves should be developed as well.
- 6) Data stewards should develop licensing agreements to provide increased access to linked spatial-social datasets that include confidential information.

The full report can be accessed at: [www.nap.edu/catalog/11865.html](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/11865.html) .

## HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: THE CURE FOR HEALTH DISPARITIES?

According to the Summit Health Institute for Research and Education (SHIRE), a policy research, advocacy, and outreach organization, health information technology (HIT) is emerging as an important strategy to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of the nation's health care system. SHIRE cites the 1985 report of then-Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret Heckler, the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) Unequal Treatment landmark study, and the 2006 National Healthcare Disparities Report issued by the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ) as references that support the trend.

On March 22, 2007 Rep. Edolphus Towns (D-NY) and Delegate Donna C. Christensen (D-VI) cosponsored a briefing on behalf of the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society (HIMSS), a healthcare industry membership organization, to help increase understanding about the HIT/health disparities connection.

Scharmane Lawson, Home Healthcare Nurse Practitioner and CEO of Advanced Clinical Consultants (ACC), knows first hand the beneficial relationship between healthcare and technology. She would stumble onto this realization in the grueling days following Hurricane Katrina. Lawson, then and now serves elderly and disabled patients throughout the New Orleans area, but when she evacuated her home in preparation for the hurricane, she thought she would have to abandon her patients as well. However, from 2005 to 2007 her practice grew in vast increments and Katrina played its part in doubling the numbers. The storms aftermath left critical information gaps as many medical records, prescription refills, and other personal data lay floating in the floods. The waters crippled several public health facilities and small operations like Lawson's during an extraordinary time of need.

Calculating the mass devastation, Katrina could likewise have destroyed Lawson's and other operations like hers. However, with a small well-known device called a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant), Lawson was able to continue to operate her practice utilizing patient's information stored on the 6.3 ounce handheld device. In the palm of her hand Lawson had created her very own electronic health records (EHR) system and the ability to service more patients in need of severe healthcare. The lessons learned from Katrina could positively impact the future of health care and technology.

### What Health Disparities? From Awareness to Action

Rick Blake, Senior Health Policy and Legislative Analyst to Towns compiled his examination of HIT and health disparities in a report entitled *Electronic Health Information, Community Health Initiatives and Health Disparities: The Need for a Coordinated National Approach*. "As this nation moves toward implementing a framework for electronic health information exchange, medically underserved communities and minority stakeholder groups have, to a large degree, been absent from the process," says Blake. "While technology has sometimes been looked at the sole means to connect national health resources, resolving gaps in health services by use of technology alone may exacerbate health disparities if we do not combine our knowledge of community health interventions and culturally sensitive approaches to care."

Neil S. Calman, President and CEO of the Institute for Urban Family Health in New York, asserted that racial and ethnic disparities in health care and health outcomes have been widely documented. While minority communities have typically been the last to benefit from such advances, Calman suggested progress in medical technology, such as electronic health records, hold much potential for improving health care in these communities.

Blake expressed optimism that mounting efforts to decrease health disparities will lead to developing nationwide electronic health information networks or NHIN. The Internet-based architecture would link disparate health information systems to allow for patients, physicians, hospitals, community health centers and others to share clinical information securely.

In March, SHIRE produced a theoretical framework entitled the *Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice Pathway* to a group of stakeholders designed to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities. The framework presented by Shelly Professor Anthony Zwi, head at the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at New South Wales University, and Shelley Bowen, a doctoral candidate at the same university, includes key organizational strategies and action plans designed to address disparities. A detailed report can be found at [www.shireinc.org](http://www.shireinc.org).

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