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COSSA Washington Update

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NSF GRANTS ATTACKED ON HOUSE FLOOR; DEFUNDING AMENDMENTS DEFEATED

On May 2 it came around again! Thirty years after the late Senator William Proxmire (D-WI) gave out his "Golden Fleece" awards and following more recent examples of former Representative Pat Toomey's (R-PA) attack on sexual health research at the National Institutes of Health and Rep. Randy Neugebauer's (R-TX) attack on research grants at the National Institute of Mental Health, it was once again time for certain members of Congress to propose defunding already-awarded, peer-reviewed grants, because they didn't like the titles or subjects.

This time the culprits were Reps. John Campbell (R-NJ) and Scott Garrett (R-NJ). The occasion was the House's consideration of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Authorization Act of 2007. Campbell, citing seven grants, and Garrett, citing two, that should not "require expenditures of taxpayer funds," offered amendments to the bill that would allow "none of the funds authorized...may be used for research related to" the mentioned grants. Of the nine grants, two were from the Social Psychology program, one from Decision, Risk and Management Science, one from Geography and Regional Science, and the rest from Physical Anthropology and Archaeology. Two were dissertation awards. Congress rejected Campbell's amendment by a vote of 195-222; Garrett's amendment was defeated by voice vote (the votes and the debate can be found in the Congressional Record of May 2, 2007. (<http://thomas.loc.gov/> Click on Congressional Record and browse recent dates.)

After receiving late notification on the evening of May 1 about Campbell and Garrett's intentions, COSSA and its allies in the scientific and higher education community worked hard to defeat the proposed amendments. COSSA was joined by its members, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the Association of American Universities (AAU), the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), government relations representatives from universities, especially those home to the principal investigators of the grants under attack, and scientific societies from the physical and natural sciences, all of whom have rallied to the cause in

previous instances of threats to peer review. The NSF's Office of Legislative and Public Affairs and the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate also responded to this threat to the integrity of the Foundation.

Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA), Chairman of the House Science Committee's Basic Research Subcommittee and a Ph.D. psychologist, and Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee and a Ph.D. physicist, led the defense of NSF and the threatened grants on the House floor. Baird declared: "When you look at a cursory examination of the title or an abstract [of a grant] you don't have an idea. That's why we have peer review." He discussed the Campbell cited grant "Study of the Accuracy of Cross Cultural Understanding of Other's Emotions" as an example. This research, Baird indicated, has been supported by the United States Army Research Institute and seen as "critical to the security of our troops serving in Iraq."

Baird questioned whether Congress, "with a cursory evaluation of the abstracts from studies, should insert ourselves in the peer-review process." He suggested Members do not have the expertise to make such judgments. Citing a letter from AAAS, Baird quoted: "Prohibiting specific grants sets a dangerous precedent for scientific research that has progressed and advanced for decades through freedom of inquiry into a broad spectrum of subjects...second guessing peer-review in this way could compromise the fabric of our public research enterprise one thread at a time."

Ehlers echoed these sentiments, suggesting he "learned long ago never to judge the research by the title of the proposal." He reminded Congress how "a few years ago when we went through exactly the same charade" regarding a NSF-funded study on ATMs. He noted how one of his colleagues then excoriated NSF for funding a study on Automatic Teller Machines, when this ATM was asynchronous transfer modes, which involves the way computers talk to each other. He also suggested that "a good NSF-funded [cultural] study beforehand would have been invaluable in determining what would happen" in Iraq.

Campbell defended his amendment by saying: "The United States taxpayer cannot fund every bit of academic research for every university, for everything that every professor wants to do across this country." Ehlers countered that NSF only "funds a small fraction of the proposals that come through," around 20 percent, and "that is why we are beginning to slip as a Nation compared to other nations."

Baird countered Garrett's amendment by pointing out that one of the studies "Reproductive Aging and Symptom Experience at Midlife Among Bangladeshi Immigrants, Sedentees, and White London Neighbors," involved examining menopause among six cross-cultural groups of women. He chastised Garrett: "I would urge you go back to your women constituents and suggest to them you decided, based on your vast medical and anthropological expertise, and your vast understanding of women's health, that menopause did not merit research funding from the National Science Foundation."

Campbell and Garrett also offered amendments to reduce authorized funding for NSF, both of which were handily defeated. The bill, H.R. 1867, passed the House by a vote of 399-17.

There is concern that similar amendments could be offered to the NSF FY 2008 appropriations bill, which provides the actual dollars to the Foundation, when it reaches the House floor in late June or early July. It appears that there is a significant segment of the Congress which has not accepted the decisiveness of peer review for the spending of federal dollars on research (including the GOP Members of the House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee, all of whom voted with Campbell on his defunding amendment). Accustomed to earmarking projects in research bills for the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Justice, and other agencies, Members have however, demonstrated a reluctance to use this process of specifying grant recipients at NSF and the National Institutes of Health. Yet, the congressional prerogative to decide how to spend federal money has consequences at these two agencies in a negative way, as some Members seek to prohibit spending money on certain grants.

COSSA co-chairs the Coalition to Protect Research, which was also active in the current situation, and which has tried to educate Congress about peer review and the scientific process. But the skepticism of the late Senator Russell Long (D-LA) who once asked: "Who are these peers?" and why do they get "to slice the Federal melon?" remains alive and well for many Members.

CHRONIC DISEASE RESEARCH: FOCUS OF SENATE LABOR, HHS APPROPRIATIONS HEARING

On April 20, the Senate Labor Health and Human Service Appropriations Subcommittee continued its examination of the individual research portfolios and budgets of the 27 institutes and centers (ICs) that make up the National Institutes of Health's (NIH). Subcommittee Chairman Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) reaffirmed the Subcommittee's plans to meet with all of the NIH directors to discuss their current budgets and how they would use any additional resources.

The theme for the third of the six planned hearings was "Chronic Diseases." Ranking Member Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) highlighted the Administration's proposed budget cut for the NIH and declared that there "ought to be a greater allocation" of funding for the agency. Specter also reiterated his belief that the public needs to exercise its political muscle on behalf of the agency by coming together for a million person march on behalf of the NIH. Four NIH institutes were featured at the hearing: the National Institute on Aging (NIA); the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS); the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI); and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK).

NIA director Richard Hodes began his testimony by noting that today, "older Americans are very different from their predecessors, living longer, having lower rates of disability, achieving higher level of education, and less often living in poverty." Hodes also contended that baby boomers will further redefine what it means to grow older in America. Despite the fact that a number of seniors are healthy in their later years, there are a number of chronic conditions that remain common among older Americans, Hodes informed the Subcommittee. He reported that half of all Americans over age 65 show evidence of osteoarthritis in at least one joint. More than half of Americans over 50 have osteoporosis or low bone mass, and cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes remain common.

The challenge posed by chronic illnesses is a daunting one, Hodes declared. He informed the Subcommittee that NIA's "robust research portfolio covers all aspects of aging from the basic cellular and molecular changes that occur as we age, to prevention and treatment of common age-related conditions, to the behavioral and social aspects of growing older, including the demographic and economic implications of an aging society." Hodes also noted that through the institute's education and outreach programs, NIA provides vital information to older people across the Nation on a wide array of topics, including living with chronic conditions, maintaining optimal health, and care giving. He also emphasized that in addition to testing ways to maintain cognitive function, NIA-supported investigators are actively seeking ways to maintain physical function into older age. He cited the Institute's support of the LIFE (Lifestyle Interventions and Independence in Elders) study, a clinical trial testing the effects of a physical activity program versus a health education program among older Americans in preventing major disability. A successful pilot study (LIFE-P) completed in 2005 showed both feasibility and positive preliminary data, permitting design and consideration of the large-scale clinical trial, he reported to the Subcommittee. However, it is a "very extensive and expensive study." It is something that we know intuitively, but "needs to be addressed scientifically," he concluded.

Stephen Katz, NIAMS director, explained that his institute supports a broad range of research, training, and health activities related to arthritis, musculoskeletal, and skin diseases. The disorders are among the "most common, chronic, and costly affecting the U.S. population, and have a major impact on quality of life and disability for patients and families," he told the Subcommittee. Katz emphasized that NIAM's mission is defined by its diversity - the disorders that are studied afflict children and adults, and affect individuals and families of all races, ethnicities, and economic strata. The institute places a strong emphasis on work that has the potential to benefit patients directly, said Katz. According to the NIAMS director, a "hallmark of research success is translation: work to bring insights from the laboratory bench to the patient bedside, and back again, with the ultimate goal of improving patient care and public health." Accordingly, the Institute recently launched the new Centers for Research Translation (CORT) program to bring together basic and clinical researchers in a way that helps translate fundamental discoveries into new diagnostics and treatments.

Three of the four leading causes of death are researched under the auspices of the NHLBI, said Elizabeth Nabel, the institute's director. The good news is that interventions early in life along with healthy lifestyle decisions "clearly make a difference." She highlighted the recent completion of the Institute's strategic plan designed "to guide its efforts in the near future." The plan's clinical and translational research goals, she noted, emphasize transmission of knowledge between basic and clinical research so that findings in one arena rapidly inform and stimulate research in the other. Nabel emphasized that a critical challenge "will be to develop personalized preventive and therapeutic regimens based on one's genetic makeup in combination with developmental and environmental exposures."

Stressing that the Institute is “cognizant of the need to improve understanding of the processes involved in translating research into practice and to use that understanding to enable improvements in public health and stimulate further scientific discovery.” Particular emphasis, according to the director, will be placed on conducting research in primary prevention and identifying interventions that work in the practice communities that will ultimately constitute the targets for translation and education.

Observing the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, Harkin noted that some would like to see the NIH applying research and doing outreach to improve people’s health. He referenced former Senator Lowell Weicker (R-CT) who, according to Harkin, used to say that the NIH is not the “national institute of basic research.” Harkin underscored that the NIH should do more to move the research out of the laboratory. “We need to hear from you and the science community,” Harkin stressed, citing the building of schools without playgrounds as example of when the community should speak up. “We need you to do the research and to inform the Congress as to what it needs to do.”

NIDDK director Griffin Rodgers pointed out that the institute supports research to combat a wide range of chronic health problems that affect millions of Americans, and which can be debilitating, deadly, and expensive to treat: diabetes and other endocrine and metabolic disease; digestive and liver diseases; kidney and urologic diseases; blood disease; and obesity. He highlighted the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), which established that regular physical activity and modest weight loss can prevent or delay type 2 diabetes in those at risk. “Important knowledge is being gained through the long-term follow-up of participants,” he explained. He noted that in a recent advance, NIDDK-supported researchers capitalized on DPP data to study the effect of a gene in an Icelandic population identified by industry, confirming that variants in the gene predispose people in a diverse U.S. population to type 2 diabetes. Importantly, emphasized Rodgers, is that the “study showed that the intensive DPP lifestyle and metformin interventions successfully delayed or prevented type 2 diabetes in people with the genetic risk factor.” Rodgers noted that NIDDK is also forging a new path to prevention through approaches such as the “HEALTHY” trial. The study is testing a school-based intervention to reduce students’ type 2 diabetes risk factors in middle schools with predominantly minority populations. According to NIDDK director, more than half of the children in the schools are overweight, and 15 percent have two additional disease risk factors.

Administration’s Budget: A Threat to Research

Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS) asked each of the directors to comment on their institute’s funding level, asking what they would do with an increase in the appropriations level. Responding, Hodes noted that it was an important question on two levels, including the limitations the current funding might place on the agency. NIA is seeking an appropriate balance between basic and translational research, Hodes explained, adding that the ability to fund research is limited by budget constraints. With regard to the success rate, the numbers have meaning in terms of the undone studies and the limits on the number of clinical trials, he replied. He noted that a particular area of vulnerability that has been highlighted by NIH director Elias Zerhouni is in the area of workforce. Even with bridge funding (funding provided to investigators between grant awards) new investigators are discouraged, which could have long lasting, adverse consequences, Hodes maintained.

Katz echoed Hodes and pointed out that under current budget conditions “many outstanding applications are not being funded.” The institutes have made a special effort to keep new investigators in the pipeline, namely, because of the investment that has been made in them, he explained. Katz, too, lamented the effect a constrained budget has on clinical trials emphasizing that his institute will continue to fund them but they will be slowed down.

Nabel emphasized the concern that has been voiced by universities across the country. There is the recognition “that the future of science lies in this generation,” and he emphasized that there is “major concern” surrounding training. NHLBI, like NIA and NIAMS, she explained will have to reduce its commitment to clinical trials. She cited a large study of health disparities in the Hispanic population in which the principal investigator will have to reduce the number of indicators in the study as an example of the actions taken to continue funding for clinical trials.

Joining his colleagues, Rodgers emphasized that training is “critically important” and represents a “tremendous investment” by the institutes in the next generation of scientists. He contended that the lost resources to fund post doctoral students “is quite likely to create a lost generation of scientists.” For NIDDK, budget constraints have resulted in the institute’s inability to fund small innovative research, he explained. It has also precluded NIDDK’s offering supplements to existing grants to bring in new talent. Likewise, there has also been a cut back on the supplements to renew laboratory equipment provided by the institute, he concluded.

SCIENCE EDUCATION PROGRAMS NEED BETTER EVALUATION

Following the recommendations of the National Academies' report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*, the new Congress has pushed through a number of bills to enhance Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education at all levels. House Science Committee Chairman Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN) has led the House's enactment of *One Thousand Teachers, One Million Minds* legislation designed to improve teacher preparation and performance in STEM subjects. Another House bill and the comprehensive Senate-passed competitiveness bill include new and enhanced STEM programs.

Now along comes a report from the Academic Competitiveness Council (ACC), a body created by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and led by Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, to pour cold water on these efforts. The major conclusion of the ACC's long-awaited report is that "there is a general dearth of evidence of effective practices and activities in STEM education." Therefore, "funding for federal STEM education programs designed to improve STEM education outcomes should not increase unless a plan for rigorous, independent evaluation is in place, appropriate to the types of activities funded."

The ACC catalogued 105 STEM education programs supported by the Federal government that spent \$3.12 billion in FY 2006. In determining the effectiveness of the programs, the ACC hired the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy to assess the evaluations from the agencies supporting these programs. Using a Hierarchy of Study Designs for evaluating the impacts of programs that has randomized control experiments at the top, quasi-experimental well-matched comparison group studies next down the pyramid, and other designs such as pre-post studies at the bottom, the analysis found that of the 115 total evaluations, only 10 met the criteria for scientific rigor. Even these ten, the report concludes, "would require additional replication and validation to serve as the basis for decisions about education policy or classroom practice." Four of the ten concluded that the educational activity evaluated had a positive meaningful impact.

In addition to its recommendation about increasing funding, the ACC also concluded: the ACC program inventory and goals and metrics should be living resources, updated regularly and used to facilitate stronger interagency coordination; agencies and the Federal government at large should foster knowledge of effective practices through improved evaluation and-or implementation of proven-effective, research-based instructional materials and methods; Federal agencies should improve the coordination of their K-12 STEM education programs with states and local school systems; Federal agencies should adjust program designs and operations so that programs can be assessed and measurable results can be achieved, consistent with the programs' goals; agencies with STEM education programs should collaborate on implementing ACC recommendations under the auspices of the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC).

The full report is available at: <http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/competitiveness/acc-mathscience/index.html>

NORDHAUS DISCUSSES ECONOMICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE; CALLS FOR IMPROVED DATA ON ENVIRONMENT

Calling it a "catastrophic error of omission," William Nordhaus, Sterling Professor of Economics at Yale, recommended the establishment of an independent statistical agency in the Federal government to collect environmental and ecological data to help measure the impacts of climate change. Speaking at a meeting of the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT) of the National Academies on May 10, Nordhaus noted that "there has been much progress in developing geophysical data on global warming. More attention needs to be given to linking the data and modeling to important socioeconomic questions."

As part of the enhanced attention, Nordhaus and his colleagues have developed a series of integrative assessment models, the latest of which called DICE-2007 can be found at: <http://www.econ.yale.edu/~nordhaus/DICEGAMS/DICE2007.htm>. It attempts to measure environmental damage, costs of abatement, industrial CO2 emissions, gross production, the carbon cycle, radioactive forcing, and mean temperature. There are also policy variables such as emission control rates. In developing this and other models, he reminded the audience that "sound risk assessments require that projections be developed in a probabilistic framework."

In trying to measure emissions trajectories, Nordhaus warned us that “there are major uncertainties at every step.” The largest is trying to calculate the growth in future world output, he suggested. To obtain better growth measures there is also a “major need for strong international data bases on the economy.” He declared: “There would be a large payoff if agencies could share their [statistical] expertise to help countries with limited expertise and resources to improve methodologies and data systems.”

Developing estimation models of global warming’s impacts on the economy has its own difficulties, according to Nordhaus. There are two major impact areas. The first are the features of a market economy such as agriculture, manufacturing, and housing. The second are non-market sectors, managed ones such as people’s gardens, and non-managed ones such hurricanes, and ecosystems.

Summarizing impact estimates from his models, Nordhaus noted that the early studies contained a major surprise: there will be modest impacts in the next 50-100 years on high-income economies. However, he explained, outside of this narrow finding, there is potential for big problems, particularly large stresses on small, tropical, and developing countries. The U.S. coastal inundation prominently displayed in Al Gore’s movie, *Inconvenient Truth*, would occur over the next one to five centuries, according to Nordhaus’ models.

Examining how these models apply to climate change policy options, Nordhaus began by discussing the “attrition of the Kyoto protocol” from 1997, with less than five percent of global emissions covered by the treaty in 2002. Projecting trajectories for emissions and temperature, Nordhaus illustrated how a carbon tax of \$50 in 2010 would lead to a significant reduction in emissions, and an eventual flattening of the temperature increase line, but not until 2085. The tradeoff for such a tax, Nordhaus suggests, is a 4.8 percent rise in U.S. gasoline prices and a 7.7 percent boost in all U.S. energy expenditures.

For further information about Nordhaus’ research in this area go to: www.nordhaus.econ.yale.edu .

COSSA MEMBERS ANNOUNCE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS: WASSERSTEIN TO STATISTICS; OLIVER TO LINGUISTICS

Two of COSSA’s Governing Members have announced new Executive Directors and two others have appointed new representatives to the COSSA Executive Committee. The Executive Committee consists of the Executive Directors or their designees of COSSA’s seventeen Governing Members. It meets three times a year and works with the Executive Director on policy and governance issues for the Consortium.

The American Statistical Association (ASA) has appointed Ronald L. Wasserstein, vice president of academic affairs at Washburn University, as its new Executive Director. Wasserstein succeeds William B. Smith, who retires effective August 15, 2007. Wasserstein joined the Washburn faculty in 1984 and was appointed to his current position in 2001. Wasserstein received a Master of Science and Ph.D. degrees in statistics from Kansas State University and a BA in mathematics from Washburn University. He is a former president of the Kansas-Western Missouri Chapter of ASA, who has also served on the ASA Board of Directors and, in 2003, was named an ASA Fellow.

The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) has announced the appointment of Felix Oliver as its new Executive Director. He replaces Margaret Reynolds who resigned in January. Oliver comes to the LSA with over twenty years of senior management experience. He has served as a senior manager of ES, Incorporated, a Washington DC-based management consulting firm; President and CEO of Granville Academy, a nonprofit national after school program; and Coordinator and Director of Health and Safety programs for the American Red Cross. Most recently, Oliver served as the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Washington Regional Health Service Planning Council which oversaw the allocation of over \$29.4 million dollars through the Ryan White CARE Act funding to the governments of the District of Columbia, Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia and as the Project Manager/Director of the HR Solutions project which provides personnel services to the U.S. Army through Department of Defense installations.

Gary LaFree, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Director of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, is the new representative of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) to the COSSA Executive Committee. LaFree served as ASC’s President during 2005-2006. He is also an ASC Fellow. He has served as the chair of the American Sociological Association’s Section on Crime, Law and Deviance and as a member of the Executive Committee of the Justice Research Statistics Association.

While at the University of Maryland, LaFree has been a founding member of the Democracy Collaborative and an invited member of the National Consortium of Violence Research. Before joining the faculty at Maryland, he served as the Chair of the Sociology and Criminology Department at the University of New Mexico for six years and as the Director of the New Mexico Criminal Justice Statistics Analysis Center for thirteen years. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Indiana University in 1979.

Stanley Presser, Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, is the American Association for Public Opinion Research's (AAPOR) new representative to the COSSA Executive Committee. He is the author of *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys* (with Howard Schuman), *Survey Questions* (with Jean Converse), and *Survey Research Methods* (with Eleanor Singer). In addition to being professor of sociology, he teaches in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology, which he founded in 1992 with colleagues at the University of Michigan and Westat, Inc. He has served as editor of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, was president of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, and is an elected fellow of the American Statistical Association. Presser was director of the Maryland Survey Research Center from 1989 to 2000. Presser's Ph.D. is from the University of Michigan in Social Psychology.

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

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