COSSA Washington Update

IN THIS ISSUE:

Volume 27, Issue 21 November 24, 2008

COSSA ANNUAL MEETING EXAMINES CHANGING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND NATIONAL SECURITY LANDSCAPES; ALSO HEARS ABOUT DISASTER RESEARCH AND SOCIAL SCIENCE EVIDENCE

COSSA's Annual Meeting took place on November 17 as more than 75 representatives of the Consortium's membership met in Washington, DC amidst the planning for the succession of President-elect Barack Obama and his new team. The other backdrop for the meeting was the continuing economic uncertainty and volatility that the lame duck 110th Congress returned to town to cope with, but did nothing about except pass an extension of unemployment benefits.

Will the New President Really Change Washington?

The COSSA meeting began with James Thurber, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies at American University, focusing on whether the election of Barack Obama and the increased Democratic majorities in the House and Senate will bring significant change to the Federal government.

Reviewing the election results, Thurber declared that Obama ran a "perfect campaign." Does he have a mandate, Thurber asked? As the first Democrat to get over 50 percent of the popular vote since Jimmy Carter in 1976 and given the George W. Bush Administration's claim of a mandate after 2000 (when he lost the popular vote) and 2004 (when his margin was much smaller than Obama's), perhaps the new President will make the claim. Thurber noted that Obama's experience as a community organizer (much derided during the campaign) suggests that he will listen a lot and try to bring disparate folks together.

The increased Democratic majorities in the House, Thurber pointed out, include a number of new "Blue Dogs," moderate to conservative Democrats from districts that have often voted for Republicans. They will be a force that Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) will have to reckon with and balance against the more liberal forces in the House who have waited eight years to enact their agenda. At the same time, Thurber expects the Republican minority to become much more ideological as the number of moderate GOP members has diminished.

In the Senate, the quest for 60 Democrats to beat back filibusters is not that important, Thurber said, since each issue would probably require Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) to structure a different coalition. On some issues, such as immigration and energy, regional differences may be more important, Thurber indicated.

As with all new Presidents, there will be a honeymoon period and given the major issues facing the country, there will be great expectations for significant action. A consensus seems to exist on the problems and threats facing the country, Thurber asserted. These include the economic/financial crisis, Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran, homeland security, immigration, health care, energy and the environment. However, political capital tends to deteriorate rapidly, Thurber noted, and so the new Administration will need to move swiftly on its agenda.

All of the major actors and stakeholders in the various policy subsystems will still play important roles: administrative agencies, White House offices, appropriations subcommittees, authorization subcommittees, specialized media, interest groups, state and local governments, and the tax committees. In many of these new personnel will make a difference. The lobbying and earmarking that has been a vital part of government policymaking will still continue, Thurber claimed, with some of the major excesses of the recent past tampered down under Obama's new ethic rules.

Will Washington change? Yes and no, Thurber concluded.

"The Short-term Economic Outlook is Pretty Grim"

"Given the extent of the disruption in financial markets, and the global character of the problem, it would hardly be surprising if the current recession were in the league with, or worse than, the worst of the postwar [WWII] period," declared Sidney Winter, Professor Emeritus at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. This means a downturn that could run as long as 16 months, Winter noted, as he assessed the current economic landscape. The real danger, he worried, is that the U.S. imitates Japan in the 1990s, their so-called "lost decade," when deflation created difficulties for that nation's economic recovery.

Winter suggested the current consensus forecasting models of the *Blue Chip Economic Indicators* is "almost surely optimistic." In early November, the prediction was that Real GDP would be 0.4 percent lower in 2009 than in 2008 and that unemployment would reach a cyclical peak near eight percent. Already Real GDP went down 0.3 percent in the third quarter of 2008 and unemployment hit 6.5 percent in October, the highest in 14 years. Winter indicated further that this did not take into account former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's announcement that this is "the worst financial crisis in a century."

The problem at the moment, according to Winter, is that "housing prices continue to fall, we do not as yet have a set of clearly stable, viable financial institutions, the debt burdens of households require them to restrain spending severely, and perhaps most important now is that a self-fulfilling spiral of negative expectations has set in." Furthermore, Winter added, the international linkages among asset and commodity markets are stronger and faster-operating than ever before exacerbating the downward movement.

Winter did envision some silver linings from the current predicament. The efforts to restrain federal expenditure growth will be deferred at least until positive real growth resumes, he said. He suggested President Bush's advice to Americans after September 11th "to go shopping" was much more applicable now. Another silver lining is that concerns about inflation, which were mounting only months ago, have receded as commodity prices, including gasoline, have declined. This is where the concern about deflation has arisen. Finally, Winter noted, that some countries, such as China have continuing growth, investment needs and strong foreign reserves and maybe they will help.

The solution, according to Winter is to bring back "Keynesianism" by acknowledging that expansionary Federal fiscal policy has a role to play in fighting a severe recession. The idea of a fiscal stimulus has been bandied about by policymakers. The question is what kind and how much. Winter suggested there should be a premium on things that work fast to dampen the downward spiral. Supporting State and local governments by the Federal government picking up more of the tab for Medicaid would be one example. Further tax relief through the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit would be another. The key, Winter asserted, is to expand programs where the apparatus is already in place.

A sustained period of economic slack, which Winter perceives, would become an opportunity to address major investment needs such as rebuilding infrastructure, making large investments in education, energy efficiency, and the challenges of climate change. The result would be higher deficits and increased debt burden, but that is the necessary price.

Finally, Winter suggested that looking past the recession, the U.S. would still face a very large long-run fiscal problem that will become worse. The aging population and the ever-rising costs of health care as well as the need for action on climate change with its rising costs are parts of this problem. Social security, Winter declared, is also a problem but not as hard to fix. There is, Winter concluded, a clear need for "creative thinking" to devise ways to address these long-term problems.

Winter, a member of the COSSA Board of Directors, substituted for Peter Orszag whose appearance at the COSSA meeting was cancelled late while he was undergoing the vetting process to become director of the Office of Management and Budget and a key member of the economic team in the new Obama Administration.

"Foreign Policy Will Overtake the Agenda by the Next Election"

Gale Mattox, Professor of Political Science at the U.S. Naval Academy, spoke to the meeting about the changing national security and foreign policy landscape. Acknowledging that the domestic economy is currently President-elect Obama's number one priority, she predicted that by the next election, foreign policy will overtake domestic concerns on the new Administration's agenda.

There are immediate concerns that even a focus on the financial crisis will not alter. In fact, Mattox noted that the economic crisis "fuels instability" in marginal states and heightens the terrorist threat. In addition, she indicated that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had already precipitated a potential first crisis by announcing plans to place missiles pointed at Europe in Kalinograd as a response to NATO's plans for missile defense systems in Poland and The Czech Republic for protection against Iran.

Mattox listed the left-over problems with which Obama will have to deal. These include: Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Israel and the Palestinians, North Korea, Venezuela, and the failed states of Africa. In addition, there is always the next natural disaster, she said.

The Obama doctrine, as it evolves, Mattox suggested, would still focus on national interests, such as homeland security and terrorism, but would also include natural resources and global climate change, the reinvigoration of alliances, and a renewed focus on human rights, with the closing of Guantanamo as the first action in that sphere. She expects a change in nomenclature for the "war on terror," but not a move away from a focus on non-state actors and the new nature of asymmetrical warfare.

Obama has made clear, Mattox indicated, that the war in Afghanistan will become a priority following some agreement for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Troops will not come home, but move instead to South Asia. The situation in Afghanistan will be treated in a regional fashion with Pakistan playing a crucial role, and Mattox sees new President Zidari willing to cooperate with Obama.

She expects an Obama Administration to continue "reaching out" to the Israelis and Palestinians with the Annapolis agreement serving as the basis for further negotiations. With Iran, Mattox wonders if the Obama Administration reaches out will the Iranians reach back.

In the long-term, Obama's foreign policy team will have to concern itself with China and the continued growth of its military budget as well as its economic strength and figure out how much push on human rights the U.S. can exert. The other great Asian giant, India, will also focus our attention as the world's largest democracy has to cope with massive inequality.

As the first U.S. president with an African background, the expectations in that continent are enormous. Yet, Mattox pointed out, ethnic conflicts, even in Obama's father's ancestral home of Kenya, the fights over natural resources such as water, oil, diamonds and food, and the difficulties with disease will make any U.S. policy challenging. The U.S. military's new Africa Command has been "stood up," but it is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany because no African nation has agreed to host it yet.

In addition, Mattox related, non-traditional international issues such as the environment and disease pandemics will affect foreign policy. Furthermore, Mattox warned, how to handle the spread of weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, biological, and chemical – will still plague foreign policy decision makers in the next Administration.

Finally, she expects Obama to follow the advice of Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye and use "smart power" – a combination of military and economic activities – in conjunction with working with our allies and listening to our enemies to make the U.S. more effective in the world.

"One Size Fits All Recovery Policies Ignores the Reality of Social Inequality"

COSSA's current President Susan Cutter, Professor of Geography at the University of South Carolina and director of the University's Hazards and Vulnerability Research Institute, addressed the luncheon audience on "Disaster Research and Public Policy." Speaking as a witness before the House Science Committee in November 2005, Cutter explained that "vulnerability science" is an "emergent, multidisciplinary field that requires a place-based understanding of the interactions between natural systems, the built environment, and human systems" (see Update November 21, 2005). Her talk at this year's Annual Meeting indicated that the new field has made considerable progress in the past three years, and the word "resilience" has now become part of the nomenclature as well.

Cutter began by noting that vulnerability and resilience science asks three questions: 1) What circumstances place people and localities at risk? 2) What enhances or reduces the ability to respond to and recover form environmental threats? 3) What are the geographic patterns between and among places? "The basic truth," she declared, "is that some places are more vulnerable than others." Also evident is that often the same event produces different impacts, e.g., the different effects of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake on Oakland – the pancaking of the freeway, the Marina district of San Francisco – the fires destroyed most of the homes, and the town of Los Gatos – where structural damage to homes was minimal.

Examining the research results on risk cognition, Cutter noted that people simplify risk information, people remember what they see, people are poor probability estimators, and there is a certain "dread factor." She also indicated that there have been significant improvements in risk communication based on social/behavioral research (See Update, June 16, 2004 for a report on a COSSA Congressional seminar on this topic). Yet, entities like the Department of Homeland Security persist in their color-coded threat warning system, despite the research suggesting this is not very effective.

We also know a lot about evacuation behavior, according to Cutter. Research has concluded that: households evacuate as units and pets are part of that unit; they use private transportation and if they have them, more than one car; people will not use shelters; and distance becomes a protective measure. The pet issue became important during recent hurricanes as people would not comply with evacuation orders since they were told not to take their pets and they would return prematurely to disaster areas to rescue their pets. This led to the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards Act of 2006.

Social scientists have also built models to estimate losses in natural disasters and savings from mitigation policies, Cutter told the audience. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and tools like LIDAR, a laser-range finding sensor that sends out laser beam pulses to map things like elevation, hazards' researchers can create synthetic data systems that can help first responders and others coping with disasters like the recent wildfires in California. These developments were accelerated by the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000.

Yet, the nation still has a problem with determining the costs of disasters, Cutter asserted. The Federal government has collected some data, but they are scattered in different agencies and limited by the variables included. In particular, Cutter noted, there are no centralized, systematic, publicly available data sources at the local level. To solve this problem, Cutter and her colleagues have developed the Spatial Hazards Events and Losses and Databases in the U.S. (SHELDUS). The database now has 460,000 records and is publicly available at www.sheldus.org.

What the data collection has provided is a clear picture that losses are increasing, Cutter maintained. The usual spots like California (fires), Florida (hurricanes), Iowa (floods), have been joined by North Dakota, where elderly farm wives, often widows, have difficulty coping with disasters. Also increasing is the importance of social vulnerability of certain populations that affect the distribution of risks and losses and people's resiliency in the face of disaster. Those most vulnerable are: special needs populations, the elderly and children, the poor, non-white, non-Anglo, women, and those living in mobile homes and renting.

This leads to recovery disparities that led Cutter to proclaim that "one-size fits all policies ignores the reality of social inequality." Therefore, Cutter concluded, "Policymakers and practitioners must consider the spatial inequalities of risk, vulnerability, and resilience in any hazard reduction decision making."

"Evidence-Influenced Politics"

The final session of the meeting featured key players of the National Academies' Standing Committee on Social Science Evidence for Use. Michael Feuer, Executive Director for the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (DBASSE), which has convened the Committee, Catherine Freeman, who is the Committee's Study Director, and Ken Prewitt, the Committee's Chairman, comprised the panel.

Feuer began by discussing the National Academies' historic role in providing, on government demand, scientific knowledge to bear on public policy. He also noted that the Academies' influence is sometimes limited, e.g., its first report recommended the U.S. adopt the metric system.

In recent years, following the movement for "Evidence Based Medicine" (what were they doing before that, Feuer wondered?) public policymakers have adopted the notion that the basis for government decisions should include scientific evidence. This has become increasingly apparent in the education sector, where DBASSE produced the report on *Scientific Based Research in Education*, the No Child Left Behind Act used the phrase "scientifically-based research" over 100 times, and the priority given by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to randomized controlled experiments, often cited as the "gold standard" for producing scientific evidence for what policies work. This has also spilled over to the Department of Justice's research and evaluation activities.

All of this sometimes, Feuer related, produces excuses for non-action. If there is no valid scientific evidence for a particular policy action, this can lead to stasis with political ramifications, he concluded.

Freeman described the Committee's activities over the past few years including a planning group that attempted to discern parameters for the Standing Committee. For Freeman, the systemic improvements in social science infrastructure, the role of intermediary organizations such as think tanks, and the demands of policy makers for well-timed advice, are all part of the milieu for the Committee's charge to determine a research agenda for how the social sciences are utilized. She mentioned that the Committee will hold a joint meeting in March 2009 with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to internationalize the discussion.

For Prewitt, former director of the U.S. Census Bureau and now a professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, the Committee is trying to foster research activities to answer the age-old question of whether and how social science research influences policy. There is clearly, what Prewitt called "seepage" of ideas and research results. However, as social science becomes more complex and sophisticated how do these results "energize" policy questions, he asked.

He too mentioned the rise of think tanks and contract houses over the past 25-30 years and their willingness to present results with huge doses of "self-confidence." In addition, Prewitt noted the government's appetite for social/behavioral information and data and their willingness to create special activities like the Census research data centers to help scientists.

In discussing the relationship between the science and policy, Prewitt explained the difference between a policy variable and a study variable. For example, a researcher is interested in the impact of social isolation on dementia. However, the policy maker is more interested in the impact of social isolation in nursing homes on dementia. The first example makes social isolation a study variable and the results may not have much impact on policy. The elderly person who is isolated at home watching a lot of television may not appreciate government attempts to move him out of his house to "cure" the social isolation, Prewitt suggested. In the second case, policy makers, who have regulatory power over nursing homes, could recommend policies to limit the social isolation.

Recognizing that policy making includes a strong dose of political considerations, Prewitt used a two-by-two table to examine policy situations where the research may be strong or weak and the politics of an issue may be strong or weak. His example of a strong-strong policy arena was global warning. For strong politics, weak research, he suggested immigration. For strong research, weak politics, he mentioned disaster policy or early childhood policies. The weak-weak example was cultural diplomacy. Given these situations and the high relevance of the "political" on decision making, Prewitt claimed that "evidence-based policy" should not be the goal, but rather "evidence-influenced politics."

He concluded by suggesting that Foundations had great interest in funding studies on this relationship and that public policy schools' curricula was another area that the Committee was interested in examining in light of the panel's work.

ALETHA HUSTON NAMED NEW COSSA PRESIDENT; FIVE JOIN BOARD AS AT-LARGE MEMBERS

The COSSA Board of Directors, at its meeting on November 16, named Aletha Huston, the Pricilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor of Child Development at the University of Texas at Austin, as COSSA's new President. She replaces Susan Cutter, Professor of Geography at the University of South Carolina. The new President has a two-year term that begins on January 1, 2009.

Huston specializes in understanding the effects of poverty on children and the impact of child care and income support policies on children's development. She is a Principal Investigator in the New Hope Project, a study of the effects on children and families on parents' participation in a work-based program to reduce poverty. She is also a collaborator in the Next Generation Project, a cross-study investigation of child care, income, employment effects of welfare and employment policies. In the past, she was an investigator in the study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, funded by the Eunice Shriver National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

Huston has also conducted a program of research on television and children, co-directing the Center for Research on the Influences of Television on Children (CRITC). Her books include: *Children in Poverty: Child Development and Public Policy; Big World, Small Screen: The Role of Television in American Society; Developmental Contexts of Middle Childhood: Bridges to Adolescence and Adulthood;* and *Higher Ground: New Hope for the Working Poor and their Children.*

She has been President of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) and has won numerous research awards including the Urie Bronfenbrenner Award for Lifetime Contributions to Developmental Psychology, and the SRCD award for contributions to Child Development and Public Policy. She previously served on the COSSA Board of Directors as the SRCD representative from 2004 to 2006 and has spoken at a COSSA Congressional seminar.

Five new distinguished social and behavioral scientists will also join the COSSA Board of Directors at At-Large Members for two year terms commencing on January 1, 2009. They are:

Karen Cook is the Ray Lyman Wilbur Professor of Sociology and the current chair of the Department at Stanford University. Cook also currently serves as the Director of the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences after a stint as the Dean for the Social Sciences. Her current research focuses on issues of trust in social relations and networks. She is also working on projects related to social justice, power-dependence relations and social exchange theory, in addition to collaborative research on physician-patient trust. She has been a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1996 and the National Academy of Sciences in 2007. She has a Ph.D. in sociology from Stanford. She spoke at the COSSA Annual Meeting in 2006.

Sandra Graham is Professor of Psychological Studies in Education at UCLA. She is currently the Principal Investigator on grants from the National Science Foundation, and the W. T. Grant Foundation. Graham is also the recipient of an Independent Scientist Award, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. She is a former recipient of the Early Contribution Award from Division 15 (Educational Psychology) of the American Psychological Association and a former Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. Graham is an Associate Editor of Developmental Psychology, a member of the National Research Council Panel on Adolescent Health, and a member of the MacArthur Foundation Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. Her Ph.D. is in Education from UCLA.

J. Mark Hansen is the Dean of the Division of Social Sciences and the Charles L. Hutchinson Distinguished Service Professor in the department of Political Science at the University of Chicago. His research has focused on interest groups, citizen activism and public opinion. In 1999, he received the Heinz Eulau Award from the American Political Science Association for the Best Article Published in the *American Political Science Review* in 1998. He has also received the Outstanding Book Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists for *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. In 2003, he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has a Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale.

M. Duane Nellis is the Provost of Kansas State University. Prior to that position, he served as the Dean of Liberal Arts and Science at West Virginia University. He is a past president of the Association of American Geographers, the National Council for Geographic Education, Gamma Theta Upsilon, the International Geographic Honor Society, and the Kansas Academy of Sciences. Nellis' research utilizes satellite data and geographic information systems to analyze various dimensions of the earth's land surface. This research has been funded by more than 50 grants from NASA, National Geographic Society, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His Ph.D. is in Geography from Oregon State University.

Gary Sandefur is the Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Previously, he served as Professor of Sociology, Associate Vice Chancellor, Interim Provost, and Director of the American Indian Studies Program, all at Madison. He has served on advisory panels related to the National Children's Study, the NICHD Board on Children, Youth and Families, the Institute of Medicine Panel on Family and Work Practices, and the National Research Council Committee Assessing Behavioral and Social Science Research on Aging. He has a Ph.D. in sociology from Stanford.

These five replace James S. Jackson, director of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan, Myron Gutmann, director of the Interuniversity Consortium of Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan, William Lacy, Vice President for International Programs and Outreach at the University of California, Davis, and Shirley Malcom, director of Education at the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In addition, the COSSA Executive Committee chose Sally Hillsman, Executive Officer of the American Sociological Association as its Chair, replacing Michael Brintnall, Executive Director of the American Political Science Association, who has served for the past four years.

SBE ADVISORY COMMITTEE HEARS FROM BEMENT AND OLSEN

With the members of the transition team from President-elect Obama on-site at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Advisory Committee for the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate met on November 20 and 21. The panel, chaired by Mike Goodchild, Professor Geography at the University of California, Santa Barbara, had a discussion with NSF Director Arden Bement and Deputy Director Kathie Olsen.

Noting the presence of the transition team, Bement said they would spend three weeks examining NSF's operations and budget. The Director suggested that NSF's research initiatives were well-aligned with the research and development agenda outlined by the President-elect during the campaign. Bement described Obama's concerns as: innovation, particularly as it relates to U.S. economic health; climate change and global warning; K-12 education and math and science literacy; national security concerns such as terrorism, homeland security, and biosecurity; genetics, for NSF this would mean more work on plant genomes; ocean health; water use and availability; and public health.

Asked about NSF's role in supporting "transformative research," Bement cited the need to focus on the scientific frontier and beyond. He also declared, rekindling an old phrase, that we are "a nation at risk." At the moment, he told the Committee, the U.S. workforce in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) makes up 20 percent of the world's STEM workers. He expects that growth of science and technology in the developing world will reduce that percentage to 11 percent by 2025. China and India are making significant investments that the U.S. will be hard-pressed to counter. One way of doing that would be to broaden participation of women, underrepresented minorities, and disabled people in the scientific workforce. Members of the Advisory Committee pushed Bement for greater support for research on how to do that.

As to the importance of the SBE sciences, Bement agreed with the Committee's assessment that all the major issues facing the country have strong SBE components. He suggested that the Directorate's leadership has done an excellent job of integrating SBE into all of NSF's multidisciplinary research programs. He also noted that SBE has managed to support "research funded by others." He mentioned Project Minerva, for which the Defense Department has given SBE $8 million for research in the "Social and Behavioral Dimensions of National Security, Conflict, and Cooperation." In an earlier session at the meeting, David Lightfoot, Assistant Director (AD) for SBE, reported that 201 proposals had been received representing 169 projects for this competition. Six panels for topical areas plus one workshop panel would commence the review process on December 1. (For information about the solicitation see Update, August 11, 2008)

Bement listed a number of "highlights" from SBE research that he viewed as "transformative." These included work on: social networks; the social, psychological barriers to academic achievement; family order; game theory and decision-making; the roots of entrepreneurial success; human origins such as finding Lucy's ancestors; and the integrating microdata project known as IPUMS.

Olsen discussed the process for finding a successor to Lightfoot as AD, who will leave at the end of May 2009. She distributed the search committee roster (see next story).

One of the intriguing things about Bement's and Olsen's appearance was their future at NSF. The Director has a term of six years, but the second sentence in the NSF Organic Act says that he also serves at the "pleasure of the president." The Deputy Director, also a presidential appointee, faces the same situation. Whether the new President would move to replace either of them or both is an open question.

NSF ANNOUNCES SEARCH COMMITTEE FOR NEW SBE LEADER

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced the search committee to find a replacement for David Lightfoot as the Assistant Director (AD) for the Social, Behavioral and Economic Science Directorate (SBE). Lightfoot will complete his tenure as AD at the end of May 2009.

According to NSF Deputy Director Kathie Olsen, the Committee hopes to recommend names by the end of January 2009. An earlier position announcement had a deadline of November 15 and Olsen said that about 40 names had already been submitted.

The members of the search committee are:

Jeremy A. Sabloff, Chair
Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania

Susan R. Goldman
Professor of Psychology and Education
University of Illinois

Michael Goodchild
Department of Geography
University of California, Santa Barbara

Simon A. Levin
George M. Moffett Professor of Biology
Director, Center for BioComplexity
Princeton University

Shirley M. Malcom
Head, Education and Human Resources
American Association for the Advancement of Science

Gregory Price
Charles E. Merrill Professor of Economics
Morehouse College

Teresa A. Sullivan
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs
Professor of Sociology
University of Michigan

HOUSE EXAMINES THE ROLE OF BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH IN STIMULATING THE ECONOMY

On November 13, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health considered biomedical and behavioral research's impact on the larger economy in a hearing on the "Treatment for an Ailing Economy: Protecting Health Care Coverage and Investing in Biomedical Research." Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) explained that the purpose of the hearing was to examine "the issue of providing economic relief for millions of Americans by protecting Medicaid health care coverage and investing in biomedical research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)."

Pallone pointed out that undoubtedly "the effects of the current economic crisis are on the forefront of everyone's mind." At the same time, the "NIH is America's leading medical research agency and the foremost biomedical research institute in the world," the chair observed. "It is through the work of NIH that we are living longer and healthier lives and may someday soon find cures for the epidemics of our time like cancer and diabetes. And it will be through the NIH that we are protected from those that wish to harm us through bioterrorism." He emphasized that as the Congress explores the possibility of another economic recovery package, it "should also discuss providing additional assistance to states and creating jobs by investing in biomedical innovation and research." Pallone maintained that "[w]hile there is no question regarding the importance of the research NIH conducts to improve our health, it also provides real, direct economic benefits at the local level including increased employment, growth opportunities for universities, medical centers, local companies, and additional economic stimulus for the community." He called on Washington to act "at a time of great economic uncertainty" and submitted for the record a letter from the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Funding, signed by more than 230 organizations including COSSA, urging House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to include the NIH in any economic recovery package.

In a statement regarding the hearing, full Committee Chairman Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) also noted that an "increased investment in the NIH is vital to a successful economic stimulus package. An effective stimulus plan must quickly inject and circulate a significant amount of money into the domestic economy to reinvigorate consumer confidence, sustain employment, and contribute to more stable financial markets. NIH is a proven vehicle to provide maximum economic effect, plus it offers additional opportunities to accelerate biomedical research that will benefit all U.S. citizens," he insisted. Dingell pointed out that for the past five years Federal funding for NIH has not kept pace with inflation. At the same time, the "federal dollars that NIH sends out to communities provide direct economic benefits at the local level, including increased employment and growth opportunities for universities, medical centers, and local companies. When NIH funding is cut, communities across the Country pay the price," he noted.

Hearing witnesses included: **The Honorable Janet Napolitano** (Governor, State of Arizona), **Gene Sperling** (Center for American Progress Action), **Raymond E. Pinard** (President and Chief Executive Officer 48Hour Print), **Alan D. Viard** (American Enterprise Institute), **Craig Zolotorow** (Medicaid Beneficiary), **Raynard S. Kington** (Acting Director National Institutes of Health), **Ronald F. Pollack** (Families USA), **Rachel King** (GlycoMimetics, Inc.), and **Joachim Kohn** (Director, New Jersey Center for Biomaterials and Professor Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey).

Kington Discusses Economic Impact of NIH Funding

Acting NIH Director Raynard Kington testified regarding the economic impact of NIH funding. He explained that his testimony was "intended to provide [the Subcommittee] information about NIH funding, not to request additional resources above and beyond the President's FY 2009 budget." Kington observed that NIH's impact on public health "is well known, exemplified by substantial reductions in mortality from such threats as heart disease, infectious disease, and cancer." Noting that NIH awards go primarily to non-profit organizations in the private sector, he explained that NIH grants "are dispersed widely, to all 50 States and covering 90 percent of congressional districts." The NIH, according to Kington, estimates that "NIH grant funding supports 300,000 jobs in the U.S., approximately seven positions for each grant."

Kington informed the Subcommittee that the NIH's FY 2009 budget includes over $3.5 billion for nearly 9,800 new grants, as well as support for more than 38,000 grants. Enactment of the FY 2009 budget, he argued, would enable the NIH "to focus on priority research areas, including: clinical trials involving genomics research in multiple disease areas; translational research in heart disease and stroke; AIDS vaccine research; asthma research; health disparities; hearing loss; mental illness; addiction; kidney disease; advances in imagining; vaccines; and cancer. These critical areas of research, among others, could be immediately funded and expanded for the benefit of the health of the people here and around the world."

Responding to Pallone's question regarding how and when the NIH would spend any additional funds from a stimulus package, Kington estimated that $500 million would support an additional 1,499 grants. He pointed out that currently there are 10,000 peer-reviewed grants that have been approved and "it's just a matter of getting them out the door." Kington estimated that the agency would be ready to invest the funds within four to six weeks. Responding further, Kington also highlighted the decrease in the success rate for investigators and stressed that needs changing. As a result of the decrease, he explained that fewer young people are going into research at a time when more research is needed. The NIH is working on ways to address this problem, but needs more money to make it happen.

Ron Pollack, Families USA, spoke to a "less well known contribution" that NIH makes to the nation, the agency's role as a positive economic force in communities across America. Pollack also discussed how NIH stimulates growth and creates jobs in every state. He explained that between 80 and 90 percent of NIH's $29 billion budget supports "extramural research," research that takes place in universities, medical centers, hospitals, and research across the country. Pollack emphasized that "money clearly offers a direct benefit to the institutions that receive those funds through NIH grants or contracts." In addition, it "also brings a broader economic benefit to the larger communities of which these institutions are a part."

Noting that NIH funding represents a new source of spending from outside the state, Pollack argued that the "spending that comes from outside of the state has a larger impact on the state economy than new spending from within the state alone, through what economists call the multiplier effect."

SENATE PROPOSES $1 BILLION FOR NIH IN ECONOMIC PACKAGE

Subsequent to the House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing (see previous story), the Senate included $1 billion for NIH in a bill (S. 3689) making supplemental appropriations for job creation and preservation, infrastructure investment, and economic and energy assistance for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009. According to the legislation, the NIH funds "shall be used to support additional scientific research…none of these funds may be transferred to `National Institutes of Health--Buildings and Facilities', the Center for Scientific Review, the Center for Information Technology, the Clinical Center, the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, or the Office of the Director (except for the transfer to the Common Fund)."

The stimulus bill did not get enacted during the brief post-election session the week of November 17. The 110th Congress may return again on December 8 to try and deal further with the nation's economic crisis. However, real action may not happen until the 111th Congress convenes on January 6 and Barack Obama becomes President on January 20.

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.
UPDATE **is published 22 times per year. ISSN 0749-4394. Address all inquiries to COSSA at newsletters@cossa.org**

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