

# CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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TO: COSSA Members, Affiliates, Contributors, and Friends

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COSSA LEGISLATIVE REPORT

June 4, 1982

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This Week ...

Walgren To Be Honored

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Joint Economic Committee Reviews Economic Statistics

Senate Appropriations Hearings on the NSF Budget

Additional Nominees for the National Council on the Humanities

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Because of the Memorial Day Recess and the Congressional focus on the overall national budget, there was not enough news to justify the cost of mailing a separate issue of the COSSA Legislative Report. With this issue, we return to our schedule of weekly issues when Congress is in session.

## Walgren To Be Honored

Congressman Doug Walgren (D-PA), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology, will be honored with the Public Service Award of the Pennsylvania Psychological Association. Mr. Walgren is being given the award for his successful efforts to increase the House Authorization for the social and behavioral science research programs in the National Science Foundation and for his continuing commitment to the social and behavioral sciences.

### Congress Responds to OMB Action on Statistical Policy

Many Members of Congress have protested the OMB action abolishing the Statistical Policy Branch of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs on April 23. Most recently, the House Committee on Government Operations, headed by Representative Jack Brooks (D-TX), held hearings on statistical policy on Thursday, June 3. Because the Government Operations Committee was largely responsible for the passage of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980, which established the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in OMB and delineated the responsibilities of the Statistical Policy Branch, Mr. Brooks and members of the Committee have been very concerned about OMB's recent disregard of the intent of the legislation in abolishing the Statistical Policy Branch. The Committee is also concerned about the effect of statistical budget cuts on the operation of the government.

Among those testifying at the hearings were Christopher DeMuth, OMB Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs; Stephen Fienberg, Chairman of the Committee on National Statistics, National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council; Courtenay Slater, special consultant to the Joint Economic Committee; Peter Francese, publisher of American Demographics; and a representative of the governor of Vermont.

### Joint Economic Committee Reviews Economic Statistics

The Joint Economic Committee is undertaking a comprehensive review of the national economic statistics. The review will focus specifically upon the impact of recent budget and program changes on the collection of economic statistics and upon their accuracy and usefulness. The Committee will also look at anticipated effects of the recent abolishment of the statistical policy coordination function in OMB. Several studies are being prepared in connection with this effort by JEC staff and the Congressional Research Service. In addition, the JEC has retained Courtenay Slater, former Chief Economist for the Department of Commerce, as a special consultant on this issue. The JEC hopes to hold hearings on U.S. economic statistics later this summer.

For a different approach to this subject, see the editorial from the National Review enclosed as attachment 1.

Senate Appropriations Hearings on the NSF Budget

On May 24, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on HUD and Independent Agencies held hearings for public witnesses on the NSF budget. Russell Dynes, Executive Director of the American Sociological Association, presented testimony on behalf of COSSA and urged restoration of social and behavioral science research funding in the Foundation at the FY 1980 level.

At this point, both House and Senate Appropriations Committees have concluded hearings. Given congressional budget priorities and responsibilities, however, it is unlikely that there will be further action on the NSF appropriation until late June or July.

Additional Nominees for the National Council on the Humanities

President Ronald Reagan has made three additional nominations for the National Council on the Humanities, bringing the total of new Council nominees to nine. The additional nominees are Walter F. Berns, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute; George Carey, Professor of Government, Georgetown University; and Ellis Sandoz, Professor of Political Science, Louisiana State University. The next Council meeting is scheduled for July 29 and 30. It is expected that the Senate will confirm the nominees before the meeting.

Enclosed is a recent article from the Wall Street Journal on William Bennett's role as Director of the Endowment (attachment 2).

## Less Data, Not More

Among the things Washington will be doing less of in the months to come is gathering economic statistics. The budget cuts in agencies like the Bureau of Labor Statistics have brought howls of outrage from the two groups that use the data: businesses and social scientists.

The businesses might be persuaded to cough up some sort of user fee for their share of the data, but the social scientists predictably claim public interest. Even President Reagan needs good economic data to make decisions, they will say. Social statistics are a neutral tool. Let's not govern in the dark.

As a useful corrective to this line of complaint, we turn to the words of Sir John Cowperthwaite, who presided over the finances of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong during the spectacular boom of the 1960s. Hong Kong did not collect even the most basic economic statistics—Gross National Product, balance of trade—and Sir John steadfastly ignored the pleas of social scientists that it begin doing so. “The simple answer is that we have no practical use for them and are not prepared to go to the expense and trouble (not least on the part of businessmen and bankers, who have more important things to do) of collecting them, if indeed they are collectible here even to the rather inaccurate standards of other countries. . . . The system reacts long before any figures could be put together.”

Not only did such figures “not have a great deal of meaning, even as a basis of comparisons between economies,” but they posed an actual danger: “One of the honorable Members who spoke on this subject said outright, as a confirmed planner, that he thought that they were desirable for the planning of our future economic policy . . . . We might indeed be right to be apprehensive lest the availability of such figures might lead, by a reversal of cause and effect, to policies designed to have a direct effect on the economy. I would myself deplore this.”

Don't give the planners data, then; it only encourages them. But Sir John's point can be taken further. It might even be a good idea to stymie the planners completely by systematically falsifying the data, much as Soviet mapmakers falsify the location of rivers and dams to mislead NATO strategists. Deprived of accurate guidance, the planners' bombs might miss their targets, and the economy survive unscathed. The erroneous data would be a nuisance for businesses, of course, just as the Soviet maps must be annoying to (hypothetical) Russian tourists visiting Siberia for a weekend of white-water rafting. It's for their own good, though.

## New NEH Head Tries to Change Endowment Course

From the peaceful look of his office you would never guess that William Bennett, new head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, has one of the most dangerous jobs in Washington. But it happens that the post of NEH chairman has never been fit for a man seeking an easy life. One of Mr. Bennett's recent predecessors was hounded out of office by a U.S. Senator seeking his scalp. Another spent his term in office with his credentials for the job under a permanent cloud.

When it came time to fill the NEH post this time around, the mud-slinging made the contest for, say, Secretary of Defense look like a game of beanbag. And as if these circumstances weren't enough, Mr. Bennett finally got his job and took office at a time when the humanities endowment's budget was being cut. Part of his duties would be explaining to his constituents in the humanities how the administration, devoted as it might be to high culture, was not willing to spend any more money on it.

These things do not add up to a prognosis of easy popularity. But so far, Mr. Bennett does not seem fazed by the touchiness of his task. He tells you that he absolutely will not indulge in any nasty remarks about his predecessors, but he is

## Capital Chronicle

by Suzanne Garment

willing to be quite explicit about ways in which NEH has gone wrong in recent years.

The endowment's funding practices, he says, were encouraging too much "change for the sake of change." Furthermore, the atmosphere around the place was leading too many projects to try to sell themselves to NEH by calling themselves not just

"humanities" but "humanities and public policy" or "humanities and the headlines of the day." This atmosphere, said Mr. Bennett, was going to be reversed.

Some kinds of programs were going to come in for specially big cuts. One of these was big, expensive media projects. Another candidate for the ax was NEH's youth-grants program, designed to funnel endowment money to young people who would not fare very well if they were put in head-to-head competition for grants with older humanities scholars. Youth grants, says Mr. Bennett, just has not measured up very well against other endowment projects in terms of quality. It's not surprising, he says; "you simply don't have virtuosos in the humanities" at a tender age, in the way you might in science or mathematics.

Other kinds of programs were going to come in for special support. Foremost would be programs to encourage education in the humanities. Mr. Bennett remembered a colleague of his who once got a letter from his school administration that said, of his teaching, "Thank you for your sacrifice." The endowment was going to be working to change this attitude; the first announcement Mr. Bennett made as NEH chairman was of a series of summer seminars for teachers in the humanities where participants would work with the actual texts—not "curricula" or "methodologies"—that they would be teaching.

The endowment was going to be receptive to other such ideas as well—to other ventures in undergraduate education, to other sorts of teaching seminars, to projects such as the reinstatement of college language requirements. "This," said Mr. Bennett, "is going to be the central motif of my chairmanship."

The outlines of the changes he proposes—a move from the eager pursuit of the innovative to a more supportive climate for traditional humanities scholarship—are clear. And apart from a couple of newspaper headlines, he has been moving on these goals without stirring up a great deal of public rage. He claims, for instance, that he has not met with much subversion from the new staff, despite his critical attitude: "I think their morale is up, because I'm asking them to take their work seriously. Also, they've seen my mind changed; this contributes to morale, too."

He has been less encouraged by the response he's gotten from his humanities constituents on the outside. "I've said outright, on the budget question, that some things are simply more important than others. What's distressing is that most of the mail we've received has been about money—as if this budget reduction meant the end of Western civilization. Here I am asking the advice of my colleagues about our budget, and what I'm too often getting back is 'get more money.'"

When the endowments for the arts and the humanities began to get major funding from the federal government, there was considerable debate among conservatives about whether such funding would ever come to any good end. One camp maintained that the money was necessary if this country was to produce those works of art and scholarship that a republic needs to ennoble itself. The other camp thought the nature of democratic politics such that the endowments would soon turn into just another pork barrel.

For a while it looked as if the skeptics were going to be proven right; as the endowments expanded, so did the list of projects that looked like bones thrown to friends or trend-setters or the principle of geographic distribution. But now it seems as if the Reagan administration has managed to put in place a reasonable version of what the policy on the humanities endowment should be: less and better. What remains to be seen is whether the humanities community outside the endowment will accept the change or whether it is just busy honing the knives for the coming attack.