

# COSSA WASHINGTON UPDATE

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## VARMUS ADDRESSES NIH ADVISORY COUNCILS

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In recent appearances before meetings of National Institute of Health (NIH) Advisory Councils, NIH Director Harold Varmus summarized his first year's experience as administrator for the \$11 billion health research agency. What follows is an overview of his discussions of the significant challenges facing NIH, including issues of funding, personnel, leadership, peer review, and the intramural program.

### Social and Behavioral Research

Although not a part of his formal presentations, Varmus responded to questions about social and behavioral research at the NIH. At the National Institute of Mental Health Advisory Council meeting, when asked, "What science is NIH supposed to do?" he replied, "The best science it can do.....a broad agenda from genetic research to behavioral research." When queried further about his support for social and behavioral research, he said that he doesn't categorize biomedical and behavioral research in terms of "hard" and "soft" science, that he thinks more in terms of good and bad research. "I'm not sure what is meant by "behavioral science," he stated. "The issue boils down to methodology....I see the importance [of the research], but I also see frustration in making progress in those areas." When a council member suggested that he talk to behavioral researchers, Varmus said, "I have made some effort and my attitude isn't all negative."

In response to a question regarding whether or not there are sufficient scientists in the "pipeline," Varmus was not concerned, and quoted a recent study by the Committee on National Needs for Biomedical and Behavioral Research Personnel, which found that the annual number of predoctoral awards in the basic and biomedical sciences should be maintained at 1993 levels. What Varmus neglected to state was that the same report urged an increase in the number of awards for research training in the behavioral sciences for 1993-1996. (See *Update*, June 13)

## Funding and Personnel

Regarding future NIH funding, Varmus sees "no major increase in the next several years." Citing caps on domestic spending until 1999, he believes "it will be harder and harder each year to secure funding for research." The ramifications of flat or reduced budgets are many, and to address the lean years ahead, Varmus said he has asked institute directors at a recent retreat for their cooperation. "NIH is a confederacy, with each institute acting as a fiefdom. This is a time we need to pull together as a nation...it is a time that requires sharing and some loss of autonomy."

Reduction in personnel is a particular hardship for the NIH, according to Varmus, because many of the midlevel management cuts eliminate valuable and necessary researchers. He hopes to be able to convince the administration that the reduction targets for full time employees (FTE's) would have a disparate impact at NIH as compared to other agencies. NIH anticipates reducing its 17,000 employees to 15,000 over the next four years.

### Leadership

In his discussion of new appointments at the NIH, Varmus proudly announced the selection of his "buddy and running partner," Zach Hall, as the new director for the National Institute of Neurological Disorders

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and Strokes. Hall was previously Chair of the Physiology Department at the University of California at San Francisco. Varmus also cited his choice of Alan Leshner as Director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse; Wendy Baldwin as NIH Deputy Director for Extramural Research; William Paul as Director of the Office of AIDS Research; and Ruth Kirschstein as NIH Deputy Director. In addition, he hopes to fill the directorship for the Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research (OBSSR) by the year's end.

Regarding employment criteria for administrative positions, Varmus stated that he is seeking "a new model for a scientific administrator, an institute director who has a lively interest in science as well as being an administrator--one who perhaps still has a lab so that he might keep a lively connection." This is consistent with his philosophy expressed upon his arrival at NIH one year ago when he said, "The reason I'm not wearing a tie is that I'm trying to remind myself of who I am. While I'm here, I think it's useful to remind myself this is a scientific institution and I'm a scientist and not an administrator."

### Peer Review

Besides seeking a new model for administrators, Varmus is contemplating new ways to improve the peer review system. "The peer review system at NIH was a concern of mine even before I came to the NIH," Varmus reported. He has assigned oversight of this issue to Wendy Baldwin, who has stated that NIH's main goal is to "support quality science," and that the

examination of peer review is to make certain that it is 1) fair and efficient for applicants, and 2) consistent for applicants. Experiments to improve the system are underway and include new processes such as "triage" and "just in time" submission. (See *Update*, July 11 for a description of the new attempts to improve the system.) While Varmus and Baldwin express great enthusiasm for the opportunity to improve the system, both maintain the caveat that improving process is not a substitute for the basic need for more money to fund more research.

### Intramural Program

Responding to the Congressional mandate to report on the state of the Intramural Program (IP) at NIH, Varmus felt that the review is "optimistic, but critical." He cited three actions: 1) a review of the tenure policy to ensure that the very best scientists are part of the program; 2) standardize review of the programs; and 3) clinical center renewal. Responding to questions from advisory council members, Varmus was very clear about his support for a strong IP. "Although one could survive without an intramural program, I feel it is extremely productive." He listed several reasons for his support including the ability of scientists to work full time at the bench, the greater tendency to link basic to clinical research, and interdisciplinary opportunities/ability to link scientists. Currently, the IP is 11.3 percent of the overall NIH budget.

### CLINTON NAMES RICHE TO LEAD CENSUS BUREAU *MB*

President Clinton has nominated demographer Martha Farnsworth Riche to be the Director of the Census Bureau, a position that has remained vacant since January 1993. Since 1991 she has been the Director of Policy Studies at the Population Reference Bureau, a private research institute.

Riche was the founding editor of *American Demographics*, serving in this role from 1978 through 1991. Prior to this position, she was an economist with the Bureau of Labor Statistics. She is the author of more than 100 articles, papers, and publications, the most recent of which is "Demographic Change and the Destiny of the Working-Age Population," in *As the Workforce Ages: Costs, Benefits, and Policy Challenges*.

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Riche received a B.A. and M.A. in economics from the University of Michigan and her Ph.D. in literature and linguistics from Georgetown University. She is a member of the Population Association of America, the American Statistical Association, and the Association for Public Policy and Management.

With the 103rd Congress likely to adjourn by mid-October, the Senate must act quickly on the nomination or it will not be considered until January at the earliest. The Census Bureau has lacked a presidentially appointed leader as it has sought to plan the 2000 Census as well as address the concerns of congressional appropriators who have kept a close and skeptical eye on the agency in recent years.

### **GAO AND NSF DISAGREE ON EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION DIRECTORATE** *HS*

Responding to a request from House Science Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Rick Boucher (D-VA), the General Accounting Office (GAO) examined the ability of the National Science Foundation's Education and Human Resources Directorate (EHR) to administer and manage its programs, especially in the pre-college area. The GAO found that EHR's program officers felt their heavy workload, lack of travel funds, and high personnel turnover made it difficult to administer their programs effectively. However, it concluded that the EHR Assistant Director "was correct in his assessment that EHR has sufficient administrative resources to effectively administer its education programs." It also concluded that the workload at EHR was not sufficiently different from any other directorate.

EHR's budget more than doubled from \$242.7 million in FY 1990 to \$511.7 million in FY 1993, the period under study. (EHR is slated to receive \$606 million in FY 1995.) The funds available to EHR to administer these programs grew by less than one-fourth, from about \$6 million to \$7.3 million, adjusted for inflation.

The directorate's programs are only one part of a large federal mathematics and science education initiative. The federal government is expected to spend about \$2.2 billion on this initiative in FY 1993. Of that amount, NSF would spend 25 percent of the

government's share, by far the largest of any of the 11 agencies participating in the initiative. EHR would spend about 82 percent of NSF's total share.

Aside from the question of administrative resources, the Science Subcommittee expressed interest in examining how EHR establishes priorities for its education programs, how it evaluates the results of its programs, and how these evaluations are used in setting future priorities.

GAO concluded that priorities for the EHR are determined by its Assistant Director through an informal process involving a number of internal and external groups. External advice comes from the EHR advisory committee and the National Science Board. In addition, Congressional appropriators usually give EHR more than NSF requests and then, in report language, earmark certain funds for specific education programs. Weekly meetings of the EHR policy group, consisting of all NSF Assistant Directors, discuss education policy that cuts across directorate lines. In addition, senior staff meetings are held weekly and retreats for in-depth discussion also provide priority setting planning sessions. The results of reviews by expert panels and the results of contractor evaluations of programs are also utilized for these purposes. The NSF Director reviews all new programs and the National Science Board must approve them. NSF objected to GAO's description of all this as "an informal process."

### **Evaluations**

In response to a September 1990 directive by the Senate Committee on Appropriations, EHR initiated an comprehensive evaluation of its math and science education programs. EHR's division of Research, Evaluation, and Dissemination has the principal responsibility for overseeing the evaluations.

According to GAO interviews with staff, the Division devotes no staff to full-time work on evaluation activities related to precollege education programs. A senior division official told GAO that five additional people would be required to effectively meet its evaluation responsibilities.

Since evaluations of education programs require several years to complete, most of the contractor evaluations are ongoing. As of October 1, 1993, 2



evaluations had been completed, 15 were ongoing and 13 were planning to start within the next few years.

For over a decade, NSF has argued for more funding for staffing. During that period the number of proposals reviewed and awards managed has doubled while NSF's staffing remained virtually static. This has made life especially difficult for EHR since it had the greatest number of awards to first-time grantees, which require greater administrative guidance. It also has had a high number of rotators, who require training. Visiting project sites to observe projects first-hand has become prohibitive because of a lack of travel funds. As a result, monitoring has been done through written correspondence, telephone, or by outside contractors. According to GAO, some money originally budgeted for travel has been redirected for other competing demands within the Salaries and Expense budget.

EHR, in an attempt to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, reorganized in 1992. In addition, the directorate introduced greater use of electronic technology to help offset increases in workload. Program officers believe that the reorganization did not help reduce the workload or adequately monitor and evaluate the success of projects.

Although these complaints appeared to be echoed by the EHR's outside Committee of Visitors, the Assistant Director and other outside peer groups seemed to think EHR's education programs were fine. GAO also found that the other directorates at NSF faced similar administrative problems.

Per its custom, GAO submitted its report to the agency involved for its comments. NSF wrote in a seven page response that "Unfortunately, the draft GAO study does not fully demonstrate the understanding," of the three issues Congress asked it to review. It accuses GAO of making contradictory statements regarding priority setting at EHR, paying too little attention to its evaluation efforts, and assuming that all directorates are more or less alike in the types and workload for proposals, thus making cross-directorate comparisons unreliable. GAO claims that nothing in NSF's comments requires modifications in the report, except for a statement reflecting the formal role of the National Science Board in priority setting.

## HOUSE HEARING LOOKS AT OERI INSTITUTE ON AT-RISK STUDENTS *mb*

A September 15 House hearing examined the restructuring of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), particularly its recently created Institute for the Education of At-Risk Students. Rep. Major Owens (D-NY), chair of the Subcommittee on Select Education and Civil Rights that held the hearing, was the chief architect of a restructuring of OERI around five national institutes (see *Update*, April 4).

"We want this Institute for the Education of At-Risk Students to lead the way to some effective solutions for certain persistent long-term concrete problems," Owens said at the start of the hearing, which coincided with the annual Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) legislative conference. "It is a well-known fact that a large number of the at-risk students in this nation are African-American. Members of the CBC and other black leaders must give special attention to the development of an agency which has the potential of this Institute for the Education of At Risk Students. For the first time federal resources will be available to focus intensely on problems which have been clearly identified as priorities by African-American educators," he said. Owens praised OERI for its "timely and energetic preparations" and for involving many leaders in the education community "in the Herculean task of restructuring the Office."

Delivering what she termed a "State of the OERI address," Assistant Secretary of Education for OERI Sharon P. Robinson outlined for the panel the agency's progress in meeting the challenges of the OERI reauthorization: 1) transforming OERI into a consumer-driven organization; 2) building a secure foundation on which to design school improvements for every student; 3) uniting researchers, teachers, administrators, parents and others; and 4) advancing national educational goals by establishing a research base to support the efforts of classroom practitioners.

As part of OERI's transformation, Robinson said that the agency is "confronting the challenge of how best to improve our capacity to demonstrate the relevance of research to classroom realities. We are developing a demand-driven research agenda. Issues concerning how schools can change to enhance student learning take on a different complexion and meaning if



they emerge from real people striving to resolve real problems within stubbornly complex contexts. No longer can we continue to act on the mythical assumption that researchers themselves are the final arbiters of what counts as 'useful' research. This is myopia of the highest order."

Turning to the At-Risk institute, Robinson said it "represents a critical link in this administration's multi-dimensional assault on the roots of educational inequality," citing the School-to Work Bill, Head Start Reauthorization Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as other prongs in the attack. She told the committee that OERI has completed the competition for a five-year \$27 million National Research and Development Center to be the "intellectual dynamo" of the At-Risk institute. The winner will be announced on September 30.

Robinson said the new center will be charged with producing what she termed "definitive" studies of outstanding design, scope, and technical rigor, and also with seeking partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of entities involved with providing opportunities for students at risk. She spoke about the complexity of the problem of at-risk students, and said that researchers and others have long viewed the problem too narrowly, something she hopes the new institute will change.

### **OERI AWARDS FIELD INITIATED GRANTS** *HS*

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement has awarded ten grants in the Field Initiated Studies (FIS) program. The FIS, with a budget of under \$1 million, has always been a poor stepchild of OERI compared to the national laboratories and research centers.

The ten grantees for FY 1994 emerged from 227 submissions to the program, a success rate of 4 percent. The total amount of funding awarded was \$864,470. The awards run for periods of one year to 18 months and range from \$71,000 to \$98,000.

The grants will examine such topics as: performance of at-risk students, home language choice in Mexican-American households, learning of basic algebraic concepts, how homework affects learning

and school success, and whether student and teacher involvement in software design helps students understand social studies texts. Evaluations of teachers' use of alternate assessment methods, site-based management in Milwaukee schools, a public charter school project in Detroit, and the impact of Nebraska's statewide Internet computer system on elementary education, fill out the research portfolio.

As reported in the April 4 *Update*, under OERI's new reauthorization, 20 percent of funds appropriated to the five new national institutes will go to field initiated research. This should produce a substantial increase in funds available for this program.

### **BROOKINGS BOOK EXAMINES A CONGRESS UNDER SIEGE** *HS*

"Congress is under siege," declared Tom Mann, director of Governmental Studies at the Brookings Institution, and co-editor of a new book, *Congress, the Press and the Public*, during a recent meeting discussing the publication. The healthy skepticism necessary for democracy to flourish has turned, Mann said, to "a corrosive criticism" of the legislative institution.

"The intensity of the public animus is extraordinary," Mann noted, and unlike previous eras of hostility toward Congress, the latest evidence shows that the greatest antagonism comes from the more educated, better informed, elites. Familiarity seems to be breeding contempt, according to Mann.

Why is this happening? The two main culprits identified by the authors of the chapters in the book are the press and Congress itself. Other contributors to the problem, according to the authors, include: various events that have diminished trust in government, budget deficits which are viewed as a failure of government, divided government that produced partisanship and deadlock, and a strategy of the long-suffering minority, the House Republicans, to increase their chances of gaining a majority by denigrating the institution in which they serve.

The role of the press is documented in the book in chapters by Mark Rozell, S. Robert Lichter, Daniel Amundson, and Kimberly Courson Parker. They sharply criticize the coverage of Congress; it has



focused on "drama, personalities and pork-barrel," (Rozell), there has been a substantial decline in actual coverage (Lichter & Amundson), and radio talk show hosts spread the anti-government, anti-Congress gospel (Parker). Cokie Roberts of ABC and Tom Oliphant of the Boston Globe, appearing at the conference, agreed that recent press coverage of Congress appears to be an organized, calculated, attempt to undermine the institution. They both blamed editors and producers whose "marketing" mentality has dictated the awful coverage. Oliphant admitted that as a columnist, he senses an "absence of content" in newspaper and television stories on Congress. "It is harder to learn basic things anymore," he lamented.

Co-editor Norman Ornstein, Senior Fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, agreed with Roberts that Congress makes an easy target. He suggested that many members of Congress have contributed to the problem with their "Its not me, its them" mentality with regard to their colleagues and their institution. Congress, Ornstein argued, is also not an institution for the "contemporary culture" of short attention spans and the demand for quick easy solutions. The American people also have very little knowledge and understanding of how the institution operates and what it accomplishes. Recent surveys have discovered that many Americans believe Congress has passed certain measures it has not, and has not enacted legislation it has.

Why is this important? Mann asked. Roberts noted that there is a growing undercurrent in the country that believes that representative government is unnecessary. These folks argue that new and more powerful computer technology can and should move the country toward direct democracy. Roberts is concerned because "The country has the capacity to come apart at the seams." Thus, attacking the Constitution and the institutions it created can create a dangerous atmosphere that further weakens the stitches holding the frayed fabric together.

What can be done? Ornstein offered some suggestions regarding making Congressional action easier to understand on C-SPAN (replace the classical music interludes during votes and quorum calls with explanations of what is going on), changing the reward system in journalism to accept in-depth, content-laden coverage as the ideal, rather than investigative coverage that exposes another congressional problem,

and encouraging their elite peers to badger editors and producers to include more substance in their stories.

Also necessary, the book argues, are changes in the institution and how it is presented to the American people. Reforms to streamline work, make floor activity more useful, change the gallery and visitors tours of the Congress to explain and provide information about how Congress operates and the substance of its deliberations, rather than make them intimidating and full of the architectural history of the building, are also recommended.

### **COSSA PRESIDENT RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS POLITICAL ECONOMY AWARD**

JK

William Julius Wilson, Lucy Flower University Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at the University of Chicago and current President of COSSA, received the Frank E. Seidman Distinguished Award in Political Economy at a banquet in his honor on September 17 in Washington, DC. Wilson, who also directs the University of Chicago's Center for the Study of Urban Inequality, is the first non-economist to win the award.

The prize, which includes a \$15,000 stipend, has been presented for 21 years. It honors scholars who "advance general understanding of public and private policies and institution to improve the human condition, economically and socially." Recipients of the Seidman award have been distinguished economists, including four Nobel Prize winners. Established by financier P.K. Seidman in his brother's memory in 1974, the award is administered by Rhodes College in Memphis, TN.

Robert Solow, M.I.T. economist, and winner of both the Nobel and Seidman prizes, introduced Wilson to the banquet, calling him "the today's most significant student of the problems of the urban black community in the U.S. and the world." Wilson delivered brief remarks on the situations exacerbating racial tensions in U.S. urban areas and what must be done to alleviate those tensions.



**SOURCES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT:  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE** MB

COSSA provides this information as a service and encourages readers to contact the agency for further information or application materials. Additional application guidelines and restrictions may apply.

**Reduce Violent Crimes and Their Consequences**

As part of its 1994-1995 Program Plan the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is funding research and evaluation programs that seek to expand the base of knowledge on reducing violent crimes and their consequences. NIJ, a component of the Office of Justice Programs, is the research and development agency of the U.S. Department of Justice. NIJ was established to prevent and reduce crime and to improve the criminal justice system.

For general **research** solicitations, NIJ anticipates funding projects in each of the following areas:

- Family violence: Child abuse and neglect, Spouse assault, Elder abuse
- Firearms and violence: Illegal firearms markets, Firearms prevalence and incidents in and around schools, Juvenile firearms prevention demonstration program
- Sexual violence
- Gangs

For general **evaluation** solicitations, NIJ anticipates funding projects in each of the following areas:

- Firearms and violence
- Violence prevention
- Gangs

NIJ seeks a directed research solicitation to **increase understanding and control of stalking**. The goal of the project is to collect information on the patterns of behavior that precede violent stalking incidents in order to improve risk assessment and early intervention by criminal justice, victims services, public health, and social service agencies.

**Application Procedure:** Application materials are available from: National Institute of Justice, 633 Indiana Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20531, (202) 307-2942.

**Budget:** Up to \$2.5 million is available for the projects mentioned above. It is anticipated that this amount will support up to 12 awards. The maximum award period is 24 months.

**Deadlines:** October 15, 1994 and January 15, 1995

**Contact:** Bernard Aughter, 202-307-0154, for Domestic Violence  
Lois Mock, 202-307-0693, for Firearms and Violence and Sexual Violence  
Winifred Reed, 202-307-2952, for Evaluation  
Charles Lauer, 202-307-0626, for Stalking

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