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SENATE APPROVES LABOR-HHS BILL; REJECTS AMENDMENT TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR NIH

On September 10, after nearly two weeks of debate, the Senate approved its version of the massive Labor, Health and Human Services, Education spending bill (S. 1356).

Despite the efforts of the research community, the Senate rejected an amendment offered by Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Arlen Specter (R-PA), Ranking Member Tom Harkin (D-IA), and Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Susan Collins (R-ME) that would have provided an additional \$1.5 billion in funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Underscoring his support for the agency, Specter observed that the NIH "is one of the most important functions of the Federal Government. I don't think we have anything in our budget on the domestic side that is more important, perhaps not as important, as funding for the National Institutes of Health. That is the crown jewel of the Federal Government."

The amendment was designed to classify the additional funding for NIH as emergency spending. According to Specter, the budget resolution provides for an emergency classification if the funding is vital, urgent and compelling, unpredictable, and temporary. The additional \$1.5 billion for biomedical and behavioral research is

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KEY POLICYMAKERS FOCUS ON LONG-TERM BUDGET OUTLOOK

With budget deficits mounting as the result of the ongoing war on terrorism, the conflict in Iraq, and Administration tax cuts, two key policymakers have urged a renewed focus on the nation's long-term fiscal outlook. Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Director of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and David Walker, Comptroller General of the United States, both recently presented forecasts that paint a bleak picture of the U.S. budget for years to come.

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LABOR-HHS BILL, (Continued from Page 1)

vital “because the lives and health of Americans are at stake,” explained the Chair. It is urgent and compelling “because Americans who have family members with . . . a host of . . . ailments will tell you that with each passing day, the hope that their loved one will be saved grows dimmer.” It is unpredictable and unanticipated “because the nature of scientific enterprise is unpredictable,” he continued.

Noting that it was through Specter’s leadership that the Congress doubled the NIH’s funding over five years, Harkin explained that the amendment was designed to sustain the NIH’s momentum and ability to fund peer-reviewed grants. Harkin further noted that the Senate bill, which would increase the NIH’s funding by \$1 billion (3.7 percent), would be the smallest percentage increase for NIH since 1995. “This is the wrong time to put the squeeze on NIH funding. Doing so will severely impact NIH’s ability to award new research grants at the very time when scientists should be taking full advantage of everything they have learned over the past five years to translate that research into treatment and cures,” Harkin argued.

But Senate Budget Committee Chair Don Nickels (R-OK) objected to the amendment and raised a budget point-of-order. Accordingly, 60 votes instead of a simple majority were required in order for the amendment to pass. “This amendment breaks the budget,” Nickels said, and it was defeated 43-52.

Protecting Peer Review

During House consideration of its version of the bill, Rep. Pat Toomey (R-PA) offered an amendment that singled out five peer-reviewed grants funded by the NIH to have their funding rescinded (See *Update*, July 14, 2003). Four of the grants were for research on sexual health; the fifth grant was for a demographic study. The amendment was defeated by the slim margin of 210-212.

During the month-long August recess, the social, behavioral, and biomedical research community, led by COSSA and the American Psychological Association, increased their efforts to prevent and defeat any such proposed amendment by educating and informing members of the Senate and their staffs of the value of the sexual health research cited in the House amendment, as well as the need to protect the integrity of the merit-review process.

More than 150 social, behavioral, and biomedical organizations “concerned with the efforts to undermine

the merit review system that has been a critical factor in the success of the National Institutes of Health,” sent a letter to Specter and Harkin encouraging them to “oppose efforts during debate on the FY 2004 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriation to cancel funding for specific NIH-funded research grants that have been approved through the NIH’s rigorous merit review process.” The groups warned that “if Congress sets about to micromanage individual NIH grants, it would set a dangerous precedent that would have a chilling impact on medical research and threaten to politicize research – which could impair NIH’s ability to continue to make scientific progress on which our future health depends.”

In the end, no amendment similar to Toomey’s was introduced in the Senate.

Authorization for NIH Roadmap Activities

Meanwhile, the Senate passed an amendment that provides the NIH Director the authority to carry out the NIH Roadmap. The amendment specifically authorizes the Director to use funds available to carry out research in support of the NIH Roadmap Initiative of the Director.

The Roadmap is the result of a series of meetings convened by NIH Director Elias Zerhouni designed to develop a short list of the most compelling initiatives that the NIH should pursue and would have the biggest impact. Three themes emerged: 1) identifying new research pathways, 2) building the research teams of the future, and 3) re-engineering the clinical research enterprise. Zerhouni has allocated \$135 million to his roadmap activities. On September 30, 2003, he will announce implementation plans and details of the *NIH Roadmap for the Future of Biomedical Research*.

BUDGET OUTLOOK, (Continued from Page 1)

Ten-Year Baseline Uncertainty

Holtz-Eakin, a Trustee Professor of Economics at Syracuse University’s Maxwell School and former Chief Economist of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, testified before the Senate Budget Committee on September 3rd. He discussed the CBO’s budget projections for Fiscal Years 2003 through 2013, noting that his agency predicts the Federal Government will incur deficits of \$401 billion in FY 2003 and \$480 billion in FY 2004. (These estimates, however, were put together before President Bush called for \$87 billion to cover costs of the war in Iraq).

CBO projections, in fact, have the government running deficits until FY 2012, and the small surplus that year is due only to income from the Social Security trust fund and the assumption that the 2001 tax cuts will sunset as current law holds. Some Republicans have called for permanent extension of those cuts. Holtz-Eakin also explained that the CBO baselines (budget figures incorporating surpluses from Social Security) could change dramatically if a Medicare prescription drug benefit is passed or discretionary spending increases at a rate greater than that of inflation.

Holtz-Eakin did present some good news, asserting that the economy “seems poised for a more sustained recovery. CBO anticipates that gross domestic product (GDP) will rise by nearly 4 percent in calendar year 2004 after growing by less than 2 percent in the first half of this year.” He attributed this projection to signs of faster growth in consumer and business spending, rapid growth in Federal purchases, tax cuts for businesses, and a slightly more accommodative monetary policy. He did caution, however, that while there is an expectation that boosts will occur in investment, there is tremendous uncertainty in the forecast.

Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND), the Committee’s Ranking Democrat, asked Holtz-Eakin what advice he had for Congress regarding fiscal policy and deficits as the baby boomers retire. The Director urged that consideration must be given to whether short-term fiscal policies have an effect that can be supported in the long term. He also noted “Federal spending on Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid will rise as a share of the economy from 8 percent in 2002 to a projected level of nearly 14 percent in 2030.”

Daunting Fiscal Realities

Walker, who heads the General Accounting Office (GAO), gave an address entitled “Truth and Transparency: The Federal Government’s Financial Condition and Fiscal Outlook” at the National Press Club on September 17. His remarks picked up on the CBO projections in an effort to frame the debate on how to tackle the fiscal problems.

Walker explained that his responsibilities as Comptroller General have led him to conclude, “We must begin to come to grips with the daunting fiscal realities that threaten our nation’s future.” He explained that his remarks were based on work done by the GAO, a non-partisan independent legislative branch agency that employs a wide range of experts in key fields relating to public policy.

The Comptroller General noted that while budget deficits are understandable and sometimes necessary in times of recession and/or war, we have not been in a recession for two years (the current length of Federal budget deficits) and the deficits far exceed the costs of the war with Iraq, the campaign against terrorism, and increased spending on homeland security. Walker also asserted the projected budget outlook is not “manageable,” as the Administration claims, without significant changes in programs and policies. Specifically, he recommended that:

- The Federal Government must start exercising more fiscal discipline on both the spending and tax sides. Spending increases and tax cuts may be popular, but they may not be prudent.
- The long-term costs of major spending and tax proposals must be quantified and considered before legislation is enacted.
- Steps must be taken to ensure that both Social Security and Medicare are solvent and sustainable over time.
- Existing entitlement programs must be restructured to make them secure and aligned with 21st Century economic and demographic realities.
- Performance measures and national indicators must be developed to assess America’s position and progress relative to other major industrialized nations.
- The Federal government’s organizational structure must be streamlined and made more economical, efficient, flexible, responsive, and accountable.

But how will these objectives be realized? Walker did applaud some ongoing efforts in both Congress and the Administration, but he emphasized the need for a major national education campaign and outreach effort, given that “elected officials are not likely to get too far out in front of the American people when addressing complex and controversial issues.” He concluded: “The effort, in which the press needs to play a big part, would help all Americans plan for their future.”

The full text of Walker’s speech can be accessed at <http://www.gao.gov>.

BLACK MEN: EXAMINING THEIR ROLE AND IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF THE BLACK FAMILY

On September 12, the House Committee on Government Reform held a hearing to discuss black men and boys in the District of Columbia and their impact on the future of the black family. Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) stressed the need for Congress to identify problems affecting African-American males in the metropolitan and surrounding areas and asserted “although we’ve seen some remarkable progress over the past several decades, there remain significant gaps between African Americans and other ethnicities.” Davis then commended Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) for her dedication and commitment to the future of black men and boys in the District.

According to Norton, “Jobs and education are critical cornerstones. With all the rhetoric among government officials about family values, government has failed to focus on how decent jobs almost automatically lead young men to pursue marriage and family life.” Del. Norton attributes the deterioration of the black family to young black men diverting as youths into the street life, crime, and prison as a direct result of a recessive economy and lack of employment and education. This diversion of black men from forming families is not a recent phenomenon, but began in the 1960’s with the loss of decent manufacturing jobs.

Impact of the Economy on Black Men

William Julius Wilson, Professor at Harvard University and former COSSA President, examined how the economic plight of inner city black males can be attributed to a declining labor market, decreased demand for low skill labor, and intensified competition with women and immigrants for low skilled jobs. Wilson emphasized, “Research has proven that the computer revolution is displacing low skilled workers and rewarding the more highly trained; and the growing internationalization of economic activity has increasingly pitted low skilled workers in the United States against low skilled workers around the world. Most of the new jobs for low skilled workers are in the service sector, which hires relatively more women.” Wilson argues that this lack of movement of low skilled men in the growth sectors of the economy has caused black men to be left with a sense of economic uncertainty.

Moreover, when these men do in fact get the opportunity to have an interview, many are still faced with adversity because of negative employer attitudes. “Such attitudes are classic examples of what economists call statistical discrimination: employers make general assumptions about inner-city black male workers and reach decisions based on those assumptions without reviewing systematically the qualifications of an individual applicant,” Wilson noted. Statistical discrimination is clearly a racial practice that marginalizes black men from an equal opportunity to gain legitimate employment in a tight labor market. “In the absence of employment policies to enhance job prospects of disadvantaged groups, there is little reason to assume that their long term prospects will be anything but bleak,” Wilson concluded.

Black Men and the Criminal Justice System

Paul Quander, Director of the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), discussed the relationship between the criminal justice system and black men and boys. Quander concurs, “we cannot speak of the difficulties facing African American men and boys in this city without speaking of the criminal justice system.” Although the criminal justice system has been a vital infrastructure in America’s effort to reduce crime, in 1997 nearly half of the District’s black men between 18 and 50 were either involved with, or being pursued by the criminal justice system. This alarming rate indicates, “it is far more likely today that a black male student in the District of Columbia public schools will graduate to prison than it is he will graduate from college,” Quander noted.

Due to this disturbing realization, CSOSA committed itself to encouraging behavioral change among black men and boys. Quander stated, “At CSOSA, we enforce strict accountability standards, and in the process, effect behavioral change. Our strategy is to combine accountability with opportunity – not just to tell the offender that life can be different, but to show him how he can create those differences for himself.” Today, black men and boys don’t see legitimate roles for themselves in society and, therefore, have developed their own antisocial norms and standard of behavior. However, if these black men and boys plan to reintegrate themselves into society they will need to rebuild the shattered relationships that exist within the African American community and also find their place in mainstream America.

What Do Black Men Need?

George Starke, Chairman of the Commission on Black Men and Boys and former member of the Washington Redskins, outlined how imperative it is for the Commission, government officials, and organizations to collaborate when devising policies that will directly impact black men and boys. Starke asserted policymakers should understand that black men and boys need:

1. Greater family support, community support, and housing opportunities
2. Promotion and the provision of physical and mental health services
3. Greater availability of vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities
4. Expanded juvenile justice reform and more mentoring programs

CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT REMAINS A HOT TOPIC AS SCHOLARS TESTIFY ON PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

At a September 16 joint hearing of the Senate Judiciary and Rules Committees, a group of scholars testified on Constitutional issues related to presidential succession. The hearing was the second in a week on Capitol Hill regarding continuity of the government – a topic that has drawn attention in the two years following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. In June, a Brookings Institution/American Enterprise Institute (AEI) panel of top former government officials released a report on continuity of Congress. (See *Update*, June 9, 2003).

Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS), Chairman of the Rules panel and former Senate Majority Leader, explained that the Constitution allows Congress to set the order of presidential succession after the Vice President by statute. Currently, the governing law is the Presidential Succession Act of 1947, a bill passed at the urging of then-President Harry S. Truman. That law places the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore of the Senate as second and third in line to the White House, followed by the members of the Cabinet in the order their Department was created.

Lott noted that he introduced legislation (S. 148) along with Sen. Mike DeWine (R-OH) earlier this year that would place the Secretary of Homeland Security in the line of succession between the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Interior. When the Department of Homeland Security was created in 2002, the authorizing legislation failed to place the Secretary in the line of presidential succession. S. 148 passed the Senate unanimously and is awaiting action in the House.

Lott asserted that the 1947 law is fraught with problems, including that it is likely unconstitutional since Congressional leaders are in the line of succession and that the procedures in the law allow for great uncertainty at a time of national crisis. Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX), Chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Property Rights, agreed with Lott and laid out a number of doomsday scenarios that need to be addressed in new legislation.

Professor Akhil Reed Amar of Yale Law School picked up where Lott left off by describing the key problems in the existing law:

- House and Senate leaders are not “officers” eligible to act as president under the Constitution’s succession clause.
- The “bumping” procedures proscribed by the law weaken the presidency and would create national instability. (Under the law the Speaker or President pro tempore may bump a member of the Cabinet serving as acting president at any time.)
- The law should not require someone taking over temporarily as acting president to resign his or her current office.

Amar urged that the law be repealed. To remedy the problems, he recommended a succession act that does not place any members of Congress in the line and that creates a position of Assistant Vice President following the Vice President and preceding the Secretary of State and the rest of the Cabinet. “This new official’s sole responsibility would be to receive the regular briefings, preparing him or her to serve at a moment’s notice,” but to lie low and stay out of the line of fire.

John Fortier, a political scientist and Executive Director of the Brookings/AEI Commission, agreed with much of Amar’s testimony and pointed out an additional problem with the 1947 Act: everyone in the line of succession works in Washington, D.C. This renders the nation vulnerable to a nuclear detonation in the capital. To remedy this, former presidents, vice presidents,

members of Congress, Cabinet members, and sitting governors could be put into the line of succession through the creation of a set of special offices, to be nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate. These “officers” would receive security briefings and keep in contact with the Administration on a regular basis, thus preparing them to take over in the event of a catastrophe.

Cornyn indicated after the hearing that the Bush Administration has not yet been consulted about this issue but that “they are free to present their views to Congress at any time.” Fortier indicated that the Brookings/AEI panel will meet on October 27 to discuss Presidential Succession.

HHS RELEASES BUSINESS STRATEGY REPORT URGING PREVENTION EFFORTS

“So many of our health problems can be avoided through diet, exercise, and making sure we take care of ourselves. By promoting healthy lifestyles, we can improve the quality of life for all Americans, and reduce health care costs dramatically,” observes Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson in the recently released report, *Prevention Makes Common Cents*.

Geared toward highlighting the importance of employers making health promotion a part of their business strategy, the report indicates that in 2003, the United States expects to spend \$1.66 trillion in health care expenditures. “Much of these costs can be attributed to the diagnosis and treatment of chronic diseases and conditions such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and asthma,” according to the report. It also highlights “the significant economic toll that preventable diseases take on businesses, workers, and the nation.” The report, which is a review of health promotion programs offered by employers such as Motorola, Caterpillar, and Pfizer, notes that:

- Approximately 129 million U.S. adults are overweight or obese and cost anywhere from \$69 billion to \$117 billion in health care costs per year.
- Cardiovascular disease (heart disease and stroke) cost more than \$300 billion each year.

- Approximately 23 million adults and 9 million children have been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lifetime, costing near \$14 billion per year.
- Diabetes, which affects an estimated 17 million people (6.2 percent of the population), cost approximately \$132 billion in 2000.

The release of the report preceded an Executive Roundtable Thompson held with CEOs of major corporations to discuss the economic advantages of encouraging disease prevention and health promotion, including the corporate role in healthy lifestyles and overcoming the challenge of overweight and obesity. The report emphasizes that a minimal amount is spent on preventing these conditions. “There is accumulating evidence that much of the morbidity and mortality associated with these chronic diseases may be preventable,” stresses the report.

Prevention Makes Common Cents, observes, “A large part of the root cause of chronic conditions involves attitudes and behavioral choices. As a result, the prospect of reducing the prevalence of these attitudes and choices appears daunting and promising at the same time.”

“Resources and energy need to be marshaled in all sectors and at all levels of society – Federal, state, tribal, and local governments, foundations, associations, health care providers and insurers, businesses, communities, schools, families, and individuals – to control and prevent chronic conditions that threaten the nation’s physical and financial well-being,” the report concludes.

According to the report, “employers have become increasingly aware that overweight and obesity, lack of physical activity, and smoking have a major impact not only on the health and productivity of their employees, but also the financial ‘health’ of their businesses.” Reviewing a small number of the health promotion and disease prevention programs provided by “noteworthy” employers, the report found that the proportion of employers who provide such programs has increased over the years.

The report, however, acknowledges that while companies have reported that these programs have had positive effects on employee health and job performance, and have resulted in cost savings for the companies that provide them, the “nature and quality of this information vary a great deal, since these programs generally were not designed to be research studies.”

Copies of the report may be downloaded from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/prevention>.

COSSA WELCOMES NEW CONTRIBUTOR; WELCOMES BACK CONTRIBUTOR

COSSA welcomes the University of Kentucky and welcomes back the University of Virginia (UVA) as our newest Contributors. UVA was previously a member of the COSSA family from 1986-1990. We look forward to working with both Universities on issues of interest to their social and behavioral scientists.

SOURCES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT

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

Centers of Excellence in ELSI Research (CEER) Request for Applications

The Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications (ELSI) Research Program of the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) has released a new Request for Applications (RFA) inviting Specialized Center (P50) and Exploratory (P20) grant applications for the development of Centers of Excellence in ELSI Research (CEERs). The CEER program is designed to support the development of research centers that will identify and investigate ELSI research questions that can best be approached through intensive and extended collaboration among investigators from multiple disciplines, using diverse methodologies. **Letters of intent are due on October 27, 2003 and applications are due November 24, 2003.**

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the ELSI staff prior to submitting an application. The complete CEER announcement is available online at: <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-HG-03-005.html>. Information on other ELSI funding opportunities is available on the ELSI Program Research Funding Opportunities website: www.geonome.gov/page.cfm?pageID=10000930.

CORRECTIONS

In the September 8, 2003 issue of *Update*:

- The story on the Senate committee recommendation for the National Science Foundation's budget for FY 2004 contained an error. The final Committee report (S Report 108-143) did include language concerning the NSF priority called Human and Social Dynamics. The report states: "The Committee notes that NSF is investing in a multi-year priority area of research in Human and Social Dynamics, and recognizes that this research will play a role in understanding the complex problems facing our Nation."
- The story on the COSSA Seminar on Educational Performance mischaracterized the findings of speaker Ron Ferguson. The paragraph on teacher encouragement should have stated:

Ferguson found that blacks and Latinos were more likely than whites and Asians to report that when they work hard, encouragement from their teachers is an important reason. In addition, among blacks, Latinos, and Asians, but not whites, students reported that teacher demands are less important than encouragement. However, his conclusion is not that teachers demand less of minority students than they do of whites or that they encourage them more. The evidence that Ferguson gathered does not show racial or ethnic differences in the frequency of encouragement or demands. It does, however, indicate that encouragement seems to matter more to minority students, especially blacks and Latinos, than it does to whites. These patterns have led Ferguson to emphasize not only content and pedagogy, but also relationships in his ongoing work with schools.

We apologize for any confusion either of these errors may have caused.

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), an advocacy organization for federal support for the social and behavioral sciences, was founded in 1981 and stands alone in Washington in representing the full range of social and behavioral sciences.

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