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SENATE, HOUSE DIFFER ON OVERALL SPENDING IN BUDGET RESOLUTION

Just before recessing for two weeks, on March 17 the Senate and House adopted different versions of the FY 2006 budget resolution, which sets the parameters for the debate over federal spending. A joint House and Senate conference committee will have to reconcile the differences when Congress returns to work on April 4.

The most significant disparity between the two Houses occurs on the overall discretionary spending limits within which the appropriations committees will be forced to work. The House set a ceiling of \$843 billion, in line with President Bush's request. The Senate version of the resolution puts the discretionary cap at almost \$849 billion. An amendment sponsored by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) putting funds back into education programs passed the Senate by 51-49, with support from moderate Republicans such as Lincoln Chaffee (R-RI), Norm Coleman (R-MN), Susan Collins (R-ME), Michael DeWine (R-OH), Arlen Specter (R-PA), and Olympia Snowe (R-ME). Earlier, Specter and Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) had succeeded in getting the Senate to adopt their amendment to increase funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by \$1.5 billion and to add \$500 million for some education programs that the Bush Administration had proposed to eliminate.

These numbers are only guidelines; the appropriators will decide the actual spending figures later in the 109th Congress.

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COSSA HOLDS CAPITOL HILL BRIEFING ON FUTURE OF RURAL AMERICA

On March 14, 2005, COSSA collaborated with the Rural Sociological Society (RSS) to bring five distinguished social scientists to Capitol Hill for a briefing on the future of rural America. The discussion was framed around the newest book by the RSS, entitled *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, which summarizes what has been learned about rural America in the past decade, identifies future high-priority research questions, and proposes recommendations for improving rural policy. More than 60 agency personnel, nonprofit advocates, and Capitol Hill staff attended the seminar and received complimentary copies of the book.

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In addition to the differences over spending, the House and Senate arrived at dissimilar figures for cutting mandatory programs, as the Senate passed an amendment sponsored by Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR) that would have the effect of limiting reductions in Medicaid funding. The House chose to make significant cuts in these programs. On the revenue side, the key to the Republican plan was to protect tax cuts from filibusters by having them considered as part of the reconciliation process later in the year. Senator Jim Bunning (R-KY) offered an amendment that succeeded in pushing the Senate tax cut mark to \$129 billion. The House had protected \$45 billion of its \$106 billion in tax reductions.

All in all, the congressional consideration of the President's budget got off to its usual start. Predictably, the House mostly endorsed the Administration's plans, while the Senate made things more complicated. Last year, the Senate's mucking left Congress without an enacted budget resolution altogether. The Republican leadership in both Houses of Congress and the Administration do not want a repeat performance this year. This suggests that there will be a great deal of hard work and tough bargaining ahead.

RURAL AMERICA (Continued from Page 1)

David Brown of Cornell University moderated the session and summed up the most important conclusions that had been drawn from the panelists' research: 1) the rural population is becoming more diverse in terms of its advancing age and increasing Hispanic population; 2) rural economies have been significantly transformed in the past decade, namely in terms of decreasing dependency on the agriculture industry, declining manufacturing, increasing reliance upon service industries, and a dearth of high-skill and high-wage jobs; 3) rural communities, especially those within commuting distance of larger areas, are experiencing high physical growth that must be balanced with protecting the natural environment; and 4) while new opportunities are being created in rural communities, poverty persists at alarming levels relative to urban and suburban areas.

Major Economic Shifts in Rural Communities May Prove Detrimental

Ann Tickamyer of Ohio University characterized rural communities as places of growing diversity, but

also as places that are more closely tied to the global economy. Earnings in rural areas are now much more heavily dependent upon manufacturing, consumer services, and government services than urban areas. Agriculture, which provided just under 15 percent of rural earnings in 1970, supplied less than five percent of the overall share in 2001. This is only one example of the decline in goods-producing industries throughout rural America.

Tickamyer attributed this economic redistribution to a number of factors. The failure of rural communities to capture high-wage "producer services" information technology, coupled with growth in low-wage consumer services and retail sectors have been serious economic limitations. Another factor is the overall loss of manufacturing and service jobs to overseas workers. Tickamyer explained that at one point, urban and suburban manufacturing jobs were being transferred to low-wage rural workers. But as globalization expanded its reach, those jobs were lost to even cheaper workers abroad. Also, the growing retirement and tourism industries, while intuitively thought to improve rural economies, can actually impose high costs on local populations, at times.

These factors are all compounded by a thinning safety net for rural families. With the average household income at only \$34,654, rural poverty is 2.2 percent higher than the nationwide average. According to Tickamyer, this type of economic vulnerability poses a serious threat to rural communities.

"Policy as Usual" Not Adequate

Panelist Rosalind P. Harris of the University of Kentucky argued that a persisting pattern of marginalizing non-white groups in rural areas has put minorities at a distinct disadvantage. According to her research, the impacts of high regional minority concentration are low educational attainment, low employment, high incidence of acute and chronic health conditions, continuing violence, and high rates of poverty. Harris also argued that throughout each minority community's thread of history, these particular trends endure, and their effects upon women and children are especially evident. Harris: "The interrelationship between racism, sexism, diminished economic power, and low social mobility form mutually reinforcing feedback loops that are apparent, but largely unacknowledged in policy discussions. Therefore, 'policy as usual' is not adequate."

In discussing the shortcomings of rural policy, Harris singles out four notable exceptions. These include: the Southern Empowerment and Economic Development (SEED) Act of 2003, sponsored by Rep. Artur Davis (D-AL), which would create a Federal Commission to address poverty in the band of southern states boasting the highest African American population (the “Black Belt”); policies implemented in Dalton, Georgia, which include innovative approaches to education and a bilingual curriculum; the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, which extends the federal policy of self-determination and self-government to native Hawaiians; and the continuing best practices in the area of tribal gaming and trust lands, which consistently show high regard for Native-American property.

Poor Infrastructure and Policy Contributes to Rural Health Risks

Lois Wright Morton of Iowa State University delved into many of the health policy problems particular to rural America. Over the past four decades, mortality rates in rural areas have been consistently higher than those in urban and suburban areas, with the anchors of rural health care infrastructure experiencing increasing difficulty staying afloat. She argued that in the broad picture, rural health policy is often most affected by state and federal health care policies such as Medicare, Medicaid, state adoption of Medicaid managed care, and the development of Critical Access Hospital (CAH) locations.

Morton explained that the physicians and pharmacists in rural hospitals have been adversely affected by upheavals in hospital management, which have led to tough choices between basic medical care and specialization, not to mention the sacrifice of advanced medical technologies. In addition, another pillar of the rural health care system, public health departments, have experienced a decreasing ability to cross-subsidize certain services, significant losses in Medicaid reimbursements, and financial instability over the past decade. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) have also developed troubles, often relying upon volunteers, coping with increased driving distances to hospitals, and access to only a small pool of local physicians.

Morton maintained that in order for rural health to move forward in the twenty-first century, several areas deserve closer attention. First, the rural health infrastructure needs more financial guidance and expertise to become more stable. Also, it would be

beneficial to network the urban and rural health care systems, allow for more local coordination with federal agencies, and to allow local public health capacity to play a stronger role in health planning.

The final panelist, Lou Swanson of Colorado State University, spoke extensively about how to better position the often-neglected rural community problems on the national agenda. He argued that there are many ways we can apply urban policy practices to rural concerns. He also discussed whether the overall trend in decentralization, or “devolution,” has benefited rural communities as originally anticipated. Swanson referred to Mildred Warner’s chapter in the RSS book, focusing on the increasingly prevalent policy idea of assuming that market-based independence for local communities will create the development benefits traditionally associated with competition. According to Swanson, it is also assumed that decentralizing redistributive programs away from the federal government will create more incentives to adapt federal programs to local circumstances. “Are these policy assumptions being played out?” asks Swanson.

Overall, he argued that the only rural communities benefiting from decentralization are those with a stronger fiscal capacity to begin with. Those below the stability level are confined to a vicious cycle: poor economic development limits revenues, which restricts government investment, and in turn, leads to reduced economic development. Thus, in order for this grand scheme of “devolution” to work, the rural communities in question must be fiscally stable first. However, the panelists laid out a convincing case that the majority of rural communities do not find themselves in such a healthy financial situation.

Paul Gaist of the Office of AIDS Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) opened the discussion period by asking the panelists to outline what the federal government can do to address problems in rural America. Brown maintained that a coherent and strategic approach was necessary at the federal level. Tickamyer’s apprehension about encouraging “flight” from rural areas provided an ample segue into COSSA Executive Director Howard Silver’s question: “How can we bring [skilled workers] back to rural areas after they attend higher education institutions in urban areas?” Swanson tackled the issue by pointing out that rural communities must develop to the point at which they are interesting, entrepreneurial places for people to live and raise children.

Nancy Stark of the Rural Research Policy Institute brought up the “youth exodus” from rural America, and

inquired as to why policymakers had not brought youth “to the table” in attempting to solve this problem. The panelists generally agreed with this policy shortcoming. But Brown also pointed out an additional reason for the youth exodus, namely the fact that rural families frequently move short distances, often creating a “churning” of rural children in those school districts. For more details about this briefing, please see: <http://polson.cals.cornell.edu/>. Also, a limited number of books remain available. Please contact the COSSA office.

SCHOFIELD NOMINATED TO LEAD OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

The White House announced its nomination of Regina B. Schofield to be the new Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP). She replaces Deborah Daniels, who resigned to return to Indiana.

OJP provides federal leadership to develop the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, assist crime victims, and improve the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Within the OJP's jurisdiction are the National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Bureau of Justice Assistance, and Office for Victims of Crime.

Schofield was previously Director of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA). She also served as the White House Liaison for DHHS, government relations manager for the U.S. Postal Service, and environmental issues manager for the International Council of Shopping Centers. Schofield received her B.A. in business administration from Mississippi College and her M.B.A. from Jackson State University.

COPAFS DISCUSSES ACS AND IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

The Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS), held its quarterly meeting on March 11, 2005 to discuss the statistical issues that will be most important in the next few months.

COPAFS Executive Director Ed Spar pointed out that approximately 70 agencies and departmental units each spend over \$500,000 per year on statistical activities. However, there are only a handful of these entities whose principal mission is the collection, analysis, and dissemination of statistics.

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Michael Hoefler gave a presentation to COPAFS members about the department's newest statistical activities, singling out the Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) as one of the areas making a great deal of progress. The OIS was formed under the mandates of both the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and the Homeland Security Act, which together call for a comprehensive system to collect, track, and analyze immigration statistics as well as monitor the effects of U.S. immigration policies. In fact, DHS is the only source of information on immigrant status, including government estimates of both the legal and illegal resident populations.

One of OIS's strategic goals is to continue its innovation by exploring new methodologies to estimate these populations and track the characteristics of immigrants. For example, the OIS is interested in building a system that links different application records in order to build a personal history for each individual, and is also considering adding more application questions that are of specific interest to policy makers. Other OIS strategic goals focus upon data usability. The office plans to further take advantage of the Internet as a medium of distributing data and analysis, broadening communications with customers and stakeholders, as well as releasing reports in a timely fashion. But as the DHS has found over the past few years, it needs steadily increasing funding in order to make the needed improvements. In FY 2005 alone, the OIS estimates that it will use \$5.9 million, almost \$1 million more than it needed in FY 2004.

Another important issue for federal statistics in 2005 is the implementation of the American Community Survey (ACS) (see *UPDATE*, November 22, 2004). Nancy Torrieri, Chief of the ACS Outreach and Analysis Staff at the Bureau of the Census, gave an update on the progress of the ACS. While it is only the outset of 2005, the 2010 Decennial Census is already in motion. According to Torrieri, a significant amount of staff, both field and administrative, were added to the Bureau to help with the growing pains involved in converting the long-form decennial census to the ACS. Currently, the ACS has been expanded to include the full United States and Puerto Rico, and is seeing favorable response rates in the new regions.

As part of its further preparation for the 2010 survey, the Census Bureau continues to make important enhancements to the MAF/TIGER geographic mapping program. In addition, the Bureau is currently testing new methods of surveying group quarters in the Baltimore-Washington, DC area. A panel that includes experts from the federal government and the National Academies oversees these activities, according to Torrieri.

One of the subjects that Torrieri emphasized most was the Bureau's outreach to local government officials. Due to the amount of field staff needed to conduct the surveys either by telephone or in person when mail response rates are low, the Bureau has made a concerted effort to inform local officials about the timing and importance of the 2010 Census. These local governments then can, in turn, educate their constituents and encourage their participation. A full-size booklet with a synopsis of the survey, contact numbers for each of the twelve regional Census Bureau offices, and answers to constituents' frequently asked questions was sent out to local officials in December of 2004. For more information, the ACS Outreach and Analysis staff has created an ACS email bulletin, which can be subscribed to by visiting: www.census.gov/acs.

NIH DISCUSSES GENETICS AND ENVIRONMENT

On March 28, the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) Committee on Assessing Interaction among Social, Behavioral, and Genetic Factors and Health held the first of its meetings within a project designed to "examine the state of the science on gene-environment interactions that affect human health, with a focus on the social environment." The study is primarily sponsored by the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), with additional funding from the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI) and the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS).

Dan Blazer, professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University, will chair the 18-month IOM study, which will identify approaches and strategies that will strengthen the integration of social, behavioral, and genetic research in this field. Ronald Abeles, Special Assistant to the Director of OBSSR, outlined the Committee's charter. Abeles informed the Committee that the

study began with a series of conversations between NHGRI's Director Francis Collins and then-OBSSR Director Raynard Kington regarding how to "better integrate behavioral, social, and genetic research."

According to Abeles, Collins, and Kington, "it is widely recognized that a complex interplay of genetic, behavioral, social-environmental, and physical-environmental factors influences vulnerability and resistance to disease." They also recognized that while significant progress has been made in "detailing human genetic endowment... comparatively little progress has been made in a) identifying factors in the environment, especially in the social environment, that interact with genetic factors, and in b) specifying the processes and pathways through which such interactions influence health and illness." Advances in this area should improve the ability to predict, diagnose, prevent, and treat disease, Abeles explained the Committee.

He related that through the study, the NIH is seeking guidance on several major questions and sub-questions, including:

How should social environments be conceptualized and measured to facilitate and promote genetic research? Which aspects or dimensions of the social environment (e.g., society, social institution, small group, dyad) should be included and measured, and at what level of analysis? How do we consider both the immediate and cumulative (life course) as well trans-generational effects of interactions among behaviors, environments, and genes? How should the contextual meaning of social variables be handled? To what extent are social environments an independent variable and to what extent do people's genetic endowment influence their choice of social environments, or even induce people to change their social environment?

What strategies are most likely to produce "breakthroughs" quickly? To what extent should initial efforts concentrate on conditions that are primarily genetically determined, but which may have behavioral and social components of causality that are not yet known? Should initial efforts focus upon conditions that involve complex genetic and environmental influences (e.g., substance abuse, HIV, obesity, alcoholism)? Should support be given to cross-national or cross-cultural studies that offer opportunities for quasi-experimental designs? What are the advantages and disadvantages of augmenting existing or establishing new population-based studies?

How can animal models be used more effectively?

How can animal models be better utilized to elucidate the interactions through which genetics and social environments influence health? Are new animal models needed? For which kinds of research would animal studies be most useful? What are the limits to generalizing and translating conclusions from animal models to human beings?

What new methods and analytic techniques are needed to advance research on genetics and social environments? What are the appropriate methods and data analytic strategies at the interface of genes and the social environment?

How can behavioral phenotypes be better conceptualized and measured? Abeles explained that “in much research that attempts to correlate genotypes with phenotypes, obtaining appropriate genotypic information is often less challenging than obtaining appropriate phenotypic information. There is difficulty in defining phenotypes in a scientifically valid and reproducible manner. Similarly, defining behaviors in a scientifically valid and reproducible manner (and measuring them) may be a major impediment to the success of attempts to examine the interactions between genes and behaviors. How should this challenge be dealt with?

Abeles noted that the complexities of research at the interface of genetics, behavioral science, and social science may require researchers with new skills, knowledge, and experience. Equally, he related, it is likely that large and complex data sets will be established and utilized, which will pose novel challenges for their management and analysis as well as for the protection of the rights and privacy of study participants. Accordingly, it will be important, said Abeles, to address such questions as:

- What kinds of researchers are needed and how can they best be trained?
- Are particular institutional arrangements and resources needed to provide training and to sustain research in these areas?
- Would the existence of well-characterized (genetically, behaviorally, and social-environmentally) pools of research participants facilitate research?
- How can longitudinal, interdisciplinary studies be established and maintained?

- Should standards be established for data release and sharing, including the safeguards for privacy of the participants?
- How can knowledge and expertise gained through research be disseminated to other researchers and ultimately to clinical practitioners and public health policymakers?

Concluding, Abeles stressed that the NIH is seeking guidance that goes beyond simply recommending that “more research is needed on interactions among social-environment and genes.”

REQUEST FOR COMMENT ON HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTIONS

The Office of Public Health and Science within the Department of Health and Human Services seeks comments on criteria that have been recommended to the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) regarding whether procedures prescribed by institutions outside of the U.S. afford protections that are at least equivalent to those provided in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Research Subjects, collectively known as the Common Rule.

The report under consideration, *Report of the Equivalent Protections Working Group*, was generated by representatives from the various agencies who are signatories to the Common Rule and chaired by James V. Lavery, Fogarty International Center and Department of Bioethics at the Warren G. Magnuson Center, NIH.

Comments are due by May 24, 2005 and should be submitted to Ms. Gail Carter, Division of Policy and Assurances, Office for Human Research Protections, 1101 Wooten Parkway, Suite 200, The Tower Building, Rockville, MD 20852. Comments also may be sent via fax to (301) 402-0527 or by email to: EQFRN@osophs.dhhs.gov. The report is available at: www.hhs.gov/ohrp/international/EPWGReport2003.pdf.

For additional information, contact Glen Drew at (301) 402-4994, or email: gdrew@osophs.dhhs.gov.

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.

National Science Foundation: Next Generation Cybertools

Full Proposals are due May 30, 2005

There are many important synergistic relationships between researchers in the social and behavioral sciences and computer and information sciences. One area of interaction is in development and utilization of data. Social and behavioral scientists find new ways to create and analyze data in their endeavors to describe human and organizational behavior. Computer and information scientists conduct research that yields new ways to improve both domain-specific and general-purpose tools to analyze and visualize scientific data -- such as improving processing power, enhanced interoperability of data from different sources, data mining, data integration, information indexing and data confidentiality protection - or what NSF has termed cybertools.

This solicitation invites proposals for "**information infrastructure testbeds**", each of which would include the development of the next generation of cybertools applied to data from various sources collected in two areas of research fundamental to social and behavioral scientists: **organizations** and **individuals**. The tools that are developed on these platforms must not only change ways in which social and behavioral scientists research the behavior of organizations and individuals, but also serve sciences more broadly.

Proposals for the "**organization information testbed**" should address three specific components: the development of tools that facilitate the integration of qualitative and quantitative information from heterogeneous sources, multiple media, and/or multiple modes; investment in basic research that addresses the protection of the confidentiality of respondents in computerized, widely accessible databases; and the development of incentives, standards and policies for collecting, storing, archiving, accessing, and publishing research results using organization-relevant information.

Proposals for the "**individual information testbed**" should concern cybertools that can be applied to both large scale and distributed data-sets. Proposals should address cybertools that facilitate automatic collection, integration, annotation, archiving, accessing, and analyzing of: existing distributed data sets and/or extensive audio and video recordings and details of physical artifacts, while paying special attention to the protection of the confidentiality of participant identity in widely accessible, computerized databases.

For further information contact: Julia Lane at NSF, 703/292-7266 or jlane@nsf.gov.

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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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