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HOUSE PANEL APPROVES NIH REAUTHORIZATION BILL: CHAIRMAN FAST TRACKS LEGISLATION

On September 20, the House Energy and Commerce Committee continued to pave the way for the reauthorization of the NIH for the first time in more than a decade. By a vote of 42-1, the Committee approved the "National Institutes of Health Reform Act of 2006." Congress last reauthorized the agency in 1993. Committee Chairman Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), acknowledging during the mark-up of the bill that he would no longer chair the panel should the Democrats win control of the House in the November elections, has put the legislation on a "fast track." Barton hopes to bring the bill to the House floor the week of September 25 on the suspension calendar, which is usually reserved for non-controversial bills and requires a two-thirds vote to pass. At present, there is no Senate counterpart. Barton, however, emphasized that he plans to work to get the Senate to accept his bill.

"It is time to reauthorize the NIH," the Chairman announced at the hearing, "Improving NIH Management and Operations: A Legislative Hearing on the NIH Reform Act of 2006," held the day before the mark-up. It was the fourteenth hearing over a three-year period held by the Committee on the NIH (see Update, [May 21, 2005](#)). Barton explained that the Congress recognizes that doubling the NIH's budget is not enough; the agency also needs tools and transformation policies. According to the Chairman, there is "not enough transparency or systems" within the agency.

The measure is the culmination of a three-year effort and three drafts of the bill with input from the stakeholder community, including COSSA. The Committee sufficiently addressed many of the concerns raised by the members of the community to obtain the endorsement of many groups including the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Association of American Universities, and the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. For other organizations outstanding concerns remain.

At the hearing, and again during mark-up of the bill, Ranking Democrat John Dingell (D-MI) allowed that Barton had “made reauthorization of NIH one of [his] priorities as Chairman of this Committee.” Dingell also acknowledged that while he believed that the Chairman had “proceeded in a manner that shows Barton’s appreciation for the seriousness of this task,” he felt that the “ability of the Members to review the bill language carefully will be limited” because Subcommittee consideration of the bill had been skipped. He questioned why such a limited process was necessary. The “rushed consideration,” according to Dingell, “does not do justice to what [he] believes is good substance.” Dingell also expressed concern regarding the adequacy of the funding levels authorized in the bill, noting that “the greatest problem this Congress has created for NIH, however, is tight funding.”

Despite Barton’s support for the NIH, the bill only authorizes five percent annual increases in the NIH’s budget. He urged members to oppose an amendment by Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) which attempted to factor in medical research inflation by authorizing five percent over the BRDPI (biomedical research and development price index). Markey’s amendment failed.

The Act limits the total number of institutes and centers (ICs) to the existing number of 27, but does not eliminate or consolidate any existing ICs as some have advocated. It also codifies the recently created NIH Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Planning (OPASI) by establishing within the Office of the Director (OD) a Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) (see Update, [December 12, 2005](#)). This new Division will house the current offices within the OD, including the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR), the Office of AIDS Research (OAR), and the Office of Research on Women’s Health. In attempting to address the concerns expressed by these offices’ constituencies, the bill does not eliminate or alter their existing authorities.

Enhancing the Authority of the Director

The measure, however, also underscores the current NIH Director’s authority by emphasizing that the Director, with the approval of the Secretary, can reorganize or eliminate the offices within the OD. The Committee, via a party-line vote, rejected an amendment by Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA), which would have prohibited the NIH Director from eliminating any institutes or centers in the agency that Congress created. Barton argued that existing law currently permits such action and that the bill only puts a structure in place for that to happen. Capps pointed out that “these offices address needs that were too often ignored in the past.”

Reiterating the fact that Congress created most of the ICs, and the offices in the OD, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) submitted that the director should have to ask Congress’ permission to eliminate the Offices and that the Congress should make the final decision. Waxman also pointed out the Institute of Medicine report’s recommendations to which the bill tries to conform did not recommend such an authority for the NIH director. He further noted that NIH Director Elias Zerhouni indicated at the prior day’s hearing that he was not seeking such authority. The current authority has never been used, Waxman maintained, noting that “if Congress spells out the procedure” for eliminating the offices, institutes, and centers, it is giving the director the “green light” to do so. NIH has opposed every IC created by the Congress to give some direction for research, stressed Waxman, emphasizing the provision “makes the NIH director position more political.”

The Act also creates a “common fund” which institutionalizes Zerhouni’s Roadmap for Medical Research by providing a permanent funding mechanism for trans-NIH research projects that are identified through DPCPSI. It will grow to five percent of the total NIH budget, based on overall funding increases made through the annual appropriations process. Once the fund reaches that level, the Director, in consultation with a new advisory council called the Council of Councils would have to submit recommendations to Congress on changes to the amount reserved for the fund. Barton originally wanted the fund to grow to 10-15 percent of the NIH’s budget. The Council of Councils will also review the proposals and make recommendations for funding. The Council will be comprised of 27 members drawn from nominations of individuals currently serving on existing ICs advisory councils.

The bill requires the NIH to establish an electronic system to uniformly code research grants and activities throughout the agency. It also calls for a biennial report to Congress that must include an assessment of the state of biomedical research, a description of the activities conducted or supported by NIH, classification and justification for the priorities established by the agency, including a strategic plan and recommendations for future research initiatives to be carried out by DPCPSI.

The legislation also establishes a “Scientific Management Review Group” to facilitate a public process to review the structural organizational design of the NIH every seven years. The Group will be comprised of institute and centers directors and other scientific experts. It will evaluate the structural design of the existing ICs, and propose new institutes, and recommend restructuring plans. After holding a series of required public meetings, the Group must issue its first report to Congress within 18 months of the date of enactment of the bill. The Group needs to conduct a review of NIH and issue a report at least once every seven years. If the Group issues a recommendation regarding organizational authorities, NIH must initiate the public process toward making the change and fully implement the recommendation within a three year period. If the NIH Director, however, objects to a recommendation, he/she has 90 days to submit a report to Congress outlining the rationale.

The measure creates a “Bridging the Sciences Demonstration Program.” The NIH Director, in consultation with the Director of the National Science Foundation, the Secretary of Energy, and other agencies, is authorized to award grants for demonstration projects for biomedical research bridging “the biological, behavioral, and social sciences with the physical, chemical, mathematical, and computational sciences.”

The bill also authorizes the NIH Director to establish “High Risk, High Reward, Research” demonstration programs that award grants, contracts, or engage in other transactions, for “high-impact, cutting edge research.”

In his testimony before the Committee, Zerhouni noted that the bill “preserves the time-honored NIH system of peer review and evaluation,” a vital authority. Peer review and the “pursuit of scientific opportunity through investigator-initiated grants” remains the “mainstay of our research support mechanisms,” he testified. According to the NIH director, “the Committee is focused on organizational efficiency and effectiveness, which is the principal challenge for an increasingly large and complex organization.”

MARRETT RETURNS TO NSF TO HEAD EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

Cora Marrett, the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) first Assistant Director for the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE), will return to NSF to head its Education and Human Resources Directorate (EHR). Currently the University of Wisconsin System’s chief

academic officer, Marrett will take up her new position in February 2007. She replaces Judith Ramaley, who left NSF in December 2004. Donald Thompson and Wanda Ward have served as Acting Directors since then.

The EHR's budget has stagnated in recent years as the Bush Administration has pushed to move NSF's K-12 math and science education programs to the Department of Education. Congress has generally rejected these moves and the new competitiveness legislation continues to maintain a strong role for NSF in math and science education. EHR is also the home to NSF's many programs to help underrepresented groups as well as the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCOR), which are popular with members of Congress.

Subsequent to her leadership of SBE from 1992-96, Marrett served as senior vice chancellor for academic affairs and provost at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst for four years. She was a member of the UW-Madison faculty from 1974 to 1997, with appointments in two departments: Sociology and Afro-American Studies. While at NSF, she will be on leave from the Madison Sociology Department to which she has returned as a tenured professor.

Prior to her appointment at UW-Madison, Marrett was an assistant professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina and an assistant/associate professor of sociology at Western Michigan University (1969-74). During 1973-74, she was a senior policy fellow at the National Academy of Sciences.

In 2005, Marrett received the Erich Bloch Distinguished Service Award from the Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network, given annually to an individual who has made singular contributions to the advancement of science and to the participation of groups underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. During 1990-92, she held a half-time appointment while serving as director of two programs for the United Negro College Fund under a \$2.4 million grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation. During 1976-77, Marrett was on leave as a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in California.

She received an honorary doctorate from Wake Forest University in 1996, and was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1998 and the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1996. She has published widely in the field of sociology, and has held a variety of public and professional service positions. For the past two years, Marrett has been a member of the COSSA Board of Directors.

Her academic background includes a B.A. degree from Virginia Union University, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from UW-Madison, all in sociology.

A TRAIN WRECK COMING? WILL THE 2006 ELECTIONS RESEMBLE 2000 AND 2004?

After a morning of presentations regarding the administration of elections in this country, Doug Lewis of The Election Center, offered the election officials' prayer for 2006: "Let the Winners Win Big!"

The September 22 conference co-sponsored by the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) asked: "The 2006 Elections: Are We Ready?" The clear answer from most participants was no! AEI Resident Scholar Norm Ornstein noted he is "scared to death" that with seven weeks to go before Election Day, along with the possible control of both Houses of Congress at stake, "a train wreck is coming." This concern stems from the cornerstone of

American democracy and its electoral procedures that losers of races are reasonably satisfied that the process produces the correct result. To achieve this, Ornstein argued, election administration should be “trustworthy and auditable.” In recent elections, there has been sufficient mistrust of the conduct of elections that these criteria are no longer taken for granted, he claimed.

Beginning with the 2000 election and as recently as the September 12 Maryland primary, where poll workers did not have the cards needed to activate the new electronic voting machines when the polls opened, the election administration process has come under attack. Despite the enactment of the Help American Vote Act (HAVA) following the 2000 election debacle, the States are still debating how to administer their ballots. Maryland’s governor, Bob Ehrlich, has called for replacing the new electronic voting machines used in the primary with paper ballots for the general election.

The speakers at the event included: a computer scientist – Michael Shamos of Carnegie Mellon University; an engineer – Steve Hertzberg of the Election Science Institute; a political scientist – Charles Stewart III of MIT; a lawyer – Ed Foley of Ohio State University; the head of the National Association of Secretaries of State – Deborah Markowitz of Vermont; a member of the Election Assistance Commission set up to help the States implement HAVA – Donetta Davidson; and the aforementioned Lewis, whose group’s members are government employees whose profession is to serve in voter registration and elections administration. Tom Mann of Brookings and Ornstein served as moderators.

Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) keynoted the conference. He has introduced legislation to provide for paper verification for all electronic voting machines and to force vendors to allow for software inspection of their machines. He noted, however, that more votes are lost in the traditional problems of long lines, voter intimidation, and “monkeying with registration lists.” He also connected America’s recent problems conducting its elections to our effort to spread democracy around the world, suggesting that these difficulties have left our reputation in “tatters.”

With the introduction of electronic voting machines, voters and poll workers have faced challenges. For older voters the technology may appear daunting. For machines lacking paper trails the results may be unverifiable. Even with those providing paper trails, as Shamos noted, there are sometimes failures of printers and other parts of the machine. For people concerned with security, the unwillingness of the manufacturers to provide access to their software has raised concerns about hacking and tampering. On the other hand, Stewart suggested that the switch to machines had improved not only the count from 2000 to 2004, but also turnout.

Another major problem with the system noted by many of the speakers is the lack of poll workers in general, their advanced age in many places, and the paucity of training many receive. Markowitz and Davidson strongly implored academics, college students, and others to join the nation’s army of election workers. Stewart indicated that the increased scrutiny of local election officials has helped eliminate much of the “sloppiness” that often occurred at that level of vote administration.

Foley suggested that the recent questioning of election administration has led to increased litigation over election results. He posited that the affidavits challenging 2006 results are already in people’s computers ready for the one witness who will corroborate the discrepancies. This is not any way to run a democracy!

TAXES AND THE ECONOMY FOCUS OF NBER SEMINAR

A member of COSSA, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of how the economy works by conducting and disseminating economic research among public policymakers, business professionals, and the academic community. Each year, NBER presents a seminar on tax policy and the economy. This year's event, organized by James Poterba of MIT and held on September 14 in Washington, DC, focused on employment and health issues.

NBER President and former Council of Economic Advisers Chairman Martin Feldstein presented his arguments for unemployment insurance (UI) savings accounts as an alternative to the traditional state-based unemployment insurance system. Using the Panel Study on Income Dynamics, a National Science Foundation-funded longitudinal database, Feldstein tested a system in which individuals are required to save up to four percent of wages in special accounts, which would earn interest, and draw their unemployment compensation from these accounts rather than state UI programs. If a person's balance goes negative, the government would loan money to the account, providing a safety net. If it remains negative at retirement age, the government forgives the debt. Feldstein's analysis led him to conclude that almost all individuals would have positive balances and could then convert them into retirement income. He suggests that this new system "would have a substantial potential improvement in the incentives of the unemployed."

Lawrence Kotlikoff of Boston University examined the issue: "Does It Pay, at the Margin, to Work and Save?" Measuring the effective marginal taxes on Americans' labor supply and saving, he concluded, "not a whole lot." Using ESPlanner, a life-cycle financial planning program he developed, Kotlikoff argued: 1) that because of the incredible complexity of the U.S. fiscal system, "it's impossible for anyone to understand the incentive to work, save or contribute to retirement accounts" without very sophisticated technology; 2) that same fiscal system provides most households with *very* (his emphasis) strong reasons to limit their labor supply and saving; 3) the system offers very high-income young and middle aged households as well as most older households opportunities to arbitrage the tax system by contributing to retirement accounts; and 4) the patterns by age and income of marginal net tax rates on earnings and savings are "bizarre."

Many Americans are contemplating the idea of purchasing long-term care insurance (LTCI). So far, few have taken the plunge. Amy Finkelstein of MIT provided evidence that the Medicaid program has crowded out the demand for LTCI. Using data from the National Institute on Aging-supported Health and Retirement Survey, Finkelstein demonstrated that forcing states to use the stringent federal law Medicaid eligibility requirements, which would decrease average household assets protected by Medicaid by about \$25,000, would lead to an increase in private (LTCI) coverage by 2.7 percentage points. Not a great boost, but given the current low levels of LTCI take-up, significant. These results still indicate, Finkelstein suggested, that the vast majority of households would remain unconvinced by the sales pitches for LTCI.

Finally, Daniel Kessler of Stanford University reported on research evaluating again the effects the tax preference of health insurance deductibility has on health care spending. Earlier work has demonstrated that the deductibility of employee health insurance to employers and its non-taxable status for employees has encouraged the overconsumption of health services in the U.S. The employee exemption costs the U.S. budget, according to the Joint Committee on Taxation, \$101 billion. The employer exemption, according to the U.S. Treasury Department, is greater than that of the deductibility of mortgage interest, State and local property taxes, and all capital gains tax preferences. Kessler concluded that limiting or revoking the tax preference for health insurance "would undoubtedly improve the performance of markets for health services." The current system also provides incentives for consumers to purchase health care through low-deductible, low-copayment insurance instead of out-of-pocket systems, such as Medical Savings Accounts.

DEBORAH OLSTER APPOINTED DEPUTY DIRECTOR, OBSSR

The Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) within the Office of the Director recently announced the appointment of Deborah Olster as Deputy Director. Olster joined OBSSR in 2002 to advise the Office and to develop programs at the intersection of the biological and behavioral and social sciences. She came to Washington to serve as an AAAS Fellow at the National Science Foundation.

Olster's primary research interest is the neuroendocrine control of reproduction. She has investigated seasonal and pubertal transitions in reproductive function, sexual motivation, and reproductive dysfunction related to stress, obesity and under-nutrition, using a variety of animal models. She has also collaborated on research projects related to stress hormones and human behaviors, the regulation of food intake and temperature in laboratory animals and color perception and seasonal sexual displays in Australian bowerbirds. She served on the Psychology Department faculty at the University of California, Santa Barbara after doing postdoctoral work in behavioral endocrinology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Olster received a Ph.D. in Physiology from The University of Michigan, specializing in reproductive endocrinology.

HUMAN SUBJECTS ACCREDITATION GROUP CELEBRATES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

The Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs (AAHRPP) recently celebrated its fifth anniversary at a luncheon in Washington, DC. The Group, whose founding members include: COSSA, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Association of American Universities, the Federation of Societies of Experimental Biology, the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, the National Health Council, and Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research, has promoted voluntary accreditation of programs on campuses, medical centers, and veterans' hospitals.

Led by Executive Director Marjorie Speers, AAHRPP has overcome initial reluctance among many entities, particularly universities, to engage in the human research accreditation process. The growing list of research organizations already accredited by AAHRPP now includes 39 organizations with 106 entities. The list is comprised of organizations in the biomedical and behavioral and social sciences research fields, including community hospitals, teaching hospitals, independent review boards, research institutes, and universities. AAHRPP is currently working with an additional 380 organizations that are in the accreditation process.

During the past five years, AAHRPP has developed rigorous standards of accreditation, outlived its competition, the National Council on Quality Assurance (NCQA), and won a significant contract from the Department of Veterans' Affairs to accredit its system of medical centers.

At the celebratory luncheon, AAHRPP President Barbara Bierer, Senior Vice President for Research at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Professor of Medicine (Pediatrics) at the Harvard Medical School, thanked all those involved with the organization - the founding members, the current and past members of the Board of Directors, the people who serve on the site visit teams, the Council on Accreditation, and Speers and her staff.

For more information on AAHRPP and its accreditation process, see www.aahrpp.org

UNRAVELING THE COSTS OF CRIME ON AMERICAN SOCIETY

On September 19, the Senate Judiciary Committee chaired by Sen. Arlen Specter(R-PA), held a hearing to examine the financial impact of crime on victims and the criminal justice system. Jens Ludwig, Georgetown University Professor of Public Policy and National Bureau of Economic Research Faculty Fellow, testified that the “costs of crime to America are plausibly on the order of \$2 trillion per year.” Ludwig explained that this number includes the costs of victimization from both “street” and “white collar” crimes, the expense of administering the criminal justice system and costly private activities, including out-of-pocket funds, designed to reduce the individual risks of victimization.

Harley Lappin, Director of Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), appeared before the Committee to outline the costs of crime as it pertains to his agency. He amplified the number of challenges that affect the BOP’s ability to fulfill its mission. Lappin explained that BOP’s general approach towards cost reduction has included reviewing programs, services, and operations, and discontinuing those that are determined unnecessary or not cost effective; consolidating and centralizing services; and eliminating management and non-management positions. Lappin attributed spiraling costs of the criminal justice system to two factors that are out of the BOP’s control, the growth and changing composition of the Federal inmate population.

Looking Beyond the Numbers

Jeffrey Sedgwick, Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Director, attested that what information is known about the financial impact of crime on victims comes from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Sedgwick noted however, that while NCVS data accurately tracks trends, it significantly underestimates costs that are non-monetary or intangible.

Since 1973, the NCVS has been collecting data on personal and household victimization. Relying on four measures to estimate the financial cost of crime to victims (injury, theft, damage, and lost work), the NCVS serves as the primary source of information on the characteristics of criminal victimization and on the number and types of crimes *not* reported to law enforcement authorities. (If the Senate’s cuts to BJS’ FY 2007 budget are retained, see UPDATE [July 24, 2006](#), the NCVS will suffer significant reductions in its ability to carry out its mission.)

Mary Lou Leary, Executive Director for the National Center for Victims of Crime, stressed to the Committee how the intangible costs of crime on society can be even greater. “We witness how victimization often leads to increased substance abuse, higher rates of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder, increased risk of suicide, homelessness, higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and negative long-term health consequences,” testified Leary. “It is important when we talk about the cost of crime to use dollar figures simply as a starting point. The real cost of crime includes the cost to individual quality of life and to society-at-large.” concluded Leary.

ARE BOYS IN CRISIS?

The Education Sector, a non-profit, non-partisan, independent education think tank, recently released a report entitled: *The Truth About Boys and Girls*. According to author Sara Mead, press stories lamenting the educational decline of our nation’s boys and young men are greatly exaggerated. Her report finds that the real news is not that boys are performing worse academically, but that girls are performing better.

Mead asserts boys are not in trouble. Historically, boys now score higher on tests and achieve more academically than at any other time. However, these tests also show that girls are improving in some areas at a faster pace and have begun to narrow the gap in academic areas such as math and science, where boys traditionally outperformed girls.

The results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment administered in 2005 support Mead's idea that boys are not failing. The NAEP test shows that fourth-grade boys performed better than they had in the 2003 NAEP reading assessment. Mead finds that what emerges when you look at the data is no dramatic shift downward in boys' academic performance. Boys are still outperforming girls at all grade levels in math, science and geography. Girls surpass boys in reading and writing, but historically girls have always scored better than boys in this area. The NAEP results indicate that younger boys are starting to close the gap. In 1971, the gap between girls and boys at age nine was 13 points; that has since narrowed to five points.

Despite articles referring to the dearth of young men in college, Mead reported that men are enrolling in greater numbers than at any other time. According to Mead's research, men are more likely to attend and graduate from college today than they did in the 1970s and 1980s. Sixty percent of the men who graduated high school in the spring of 2001 went on to college compared with 64 percent of women. That gap is even smaller when compared with those enrolling in four year institutions, 41 percent of men compared to 43 percent of women.

The report does make mention that for a sub-group of boys there is cause for concern regarding their academic progress. Black and Hispanic boys and those from low income homes are not performing as well as their white middle class counterparts. The issue, therefore, is not one of gender decline, but rather race and class inequity. NAEP shows that white boys score significantly better than black and Hispanic boys in reading at all grade levels. However, NAEP also shows that although minority boys are faring poorly academically, their performance is not getting worse. The NAEP reading scores for fourth-grade black boys improved in the ten year period from 1995 to 2005; more than those of white and Hispanic boys and girls.

Mead's report concludes that boys are not undergoing an educational crisis. That the difficulties some boys face are more a product of our overall educational problems and social issues rather than gender, she concluded. Mead believes policymakers need to support and fund more research on the inherent differences in boys and girls and their brain development, and how these differences can affect their academic achievement.

For more information on this study you can go to www.educationsector.org.

COSSA WELCOMES NEW MEMBER

The Population Reference Bureau (PRB), whose President William Butz once ran the Social and Behavioral Science Research Division at the National Science Foundation, has joined the Consortium. PRB analyzes complex demographic data and research to provide accurate and up-to-date information to inform people around the world about population, health, and the environment. We look forward to working with them to promote social and behavioral science research.

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.

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