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SENATE CHAIR SUGGESTS SBE SCIENCES MIGHT NEED REMOVAL FROM NSF

Using the time-honored tradition of singling out specific, merit-reviewed grants deemed unworthy of funding by members of Congress, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) noted it may be time “to reassess the mission of the National Science Foundation (NSF)” and remove the social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBE) to “another department,” so that NSF can concentrate on the “hard sciences.”

Hutchison, who chairs the Science and Space Subcommittee of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, which has jurisdiction over the research side of any NSF reauthorization, and who also sits on the subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee that determines funding for the Foundation, made these comments at a hearing on May 2. In a speech last September, she had questioned NSF’s “focus” on the SBE sciences (see UPDATE October 10, 2005).

NSF Director Arden Bement, National Science Board Chairman Warren Washington, and AAAS Executive Director Alan Leshner defended SBE’s important research contributions. They all argued for NSF support across all the sciences and the convergence and interdependence of the physical, biological, behavioral and social sciences. Washington declared that NSF should have a “diverse, balanced portfolio.” Bement noted that the SBE sciences are broad, “very difficult,” yet deliver “high economic returns.” He again cited the research that led to auctions of the communications spectrum that have provided over \$45 billion to the U.S. government (see UPDATE, April 3, 2006). Leshner noted how every major policy issue before us

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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS PANEL BEGINS TO MOVE FY 2007 SPENDING BILLS

Despite the House of Representatives continuing inability to pass the Fiscal Year 2007 budget resolution, the House Appropriations Committee, chaired by Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA) has begun to mark up the spending bills. Deeming an overall discretionary spending target of \$872.8 billion, slightly below the President’s budget request of \$873.3 billion, Lewis allocated the funding to the eleven subcommittees and on May 3 the Agriculture and Rural Development panel made its recommendations.

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today involves multidisciplinary approaches that must include the SBE sciences. He also told the Committee that there is no other agency in the Federal government that could support basic research in the SBE sciences to the extent (52 percent) that NSF does.

Unconvinced, Hutchison continued her attack. She cited among the grants she thought “might be interesting,” but not a part of NSF’s mission, the American National Election Study, since “journalists tell us about elections,” as well as a number of other grants made by the political science and sociology programs. She suggested that these grants were wasting resources and were “peripheral” to NSF’s mission, which she believes is to have a “complete focus on the hard sciences, technology, and innovation.” She overlooked, as Bement and Leshner pointed out, over 50 years of NSF-supported research contributions by the SBE sciences to the economic and national security and well-being of this nation.

The Senator also cited the National Academy of Sciences Report, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*, referred to as the Augustine Report, which called for increased resources for the physical sciences and engineering. She ignored the part of the report that said this should not be at the expense of the social and biological sciences. Both the social and biological sciences receive considerably less funding from NSF than the physical sciences.

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS

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Lewis hopes, as he did last year, to complete the House versions of the spending bill by the July 4th Congressional recess. So far, five of the bills have emerged from the subcommittee and two have passed the full committee.

The Agriculture bill provides slight increases over FY 2006 spending for many of the agencies that support social science research. The Committee provided the **Economic Research Service** (ERS) almost \$81 million, slightly less than the President’s request, but \$5.8 million above last year. The increase will allow ERS to develop the Agricultural and Rural Development Information System to monitor the changing economic health and well-being of farm and non-farm households in rural areas.

For the **National Agricultural Statistics Service** (NASS), the panel recommended \$148.7 million for FY 2007, an increase of \$9.4 million above FY 2006, but \$3.9 million below the request. In the total, the Committee included \$36.6 million for the Census of Agriculture to collect and disseminate comprehensive data on all aspects of the agricultural economy. The Committee, in report language asks NASS to develop additional surveys of organic agriculture.

The **National Research Initiative Competitive Grants** (NRI) program received \$190 million, an \$8.8 million or five percent boost over last year. The Committee again rejected the Administration’s attempt to move some of the Integrated Activities’ programs into the NRI, continuing to fund them in that separate account. For the first time since FY 1999, the Committee recommended an increase for the **Hatch Act**, allocating \$183.3 million, up \$6.3 million from last year, for this formula grant program.

The panel also rejected the Administration’s call for eliminating earmarks, appropriating \$103.5 million in **Special Grants** directed at specific programs in specific states for projects Congress believes are worthy. The Committee did exhibit some sensitivity to calls in Congress regarding these special projects by including in the report language that accompanies the bill detailed explanations of their usefulness as well as listing their non-federal sources of funding. This includes \$1.2 million for Rural Policies Institutes (RUPRI) in Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri.

The bill goes to the House floor the week of May 15.

The Interior and Environment bill has also moved through the full Appropriations Committee. It includes FY 2007 recommendations for the **National Endowment for the Humanities** (NEH). The panel allocated the President’s requested level of \$141 million for NEH. In recent years, when the bill has reached the floor of the House, a bipartisan group of members has offered successful amendments to approve modest increases to NEH’s budget. A similar effort is expected this year, when the bill is considered, probably the week of May 15.

The Senate, which has passed its budget resolution (see UPDATE, March 20, 2006) that includes money for health and education spending and increases the discretionary spending cap \$16 million above the President’s request, has not scheduled any markups of its spending bills.

With legislative time short, House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) has already raised the spectre of a post-election lame-duck session to finish the FY 2007 spending legislation.

NSF ANNOUNCES NEW SBE DIVISION DIRECTORS

David Lightfoot, Assistant Director for the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences directorate (SBE) at the National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced the appointment of two new division directors.

Edward J. Hackett, currently a professor in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University (ASU), will lead the Social and Economic Sciences Division. He also holds an appointment in ASU's School of Life Sciences and the Consortium for Science, Policy, and Outcomes. Hackett is a former NSF program officer for the Science and Technology Studies program. His research focuses on the social organization of science, research collaboration, peer review, academic organizations, and careers. For ten years he was the principal investigator on a project examining the "Dynamics of Research Groups in Science." Since SBE has taken the lead in devising a new science of science policy called for by Presidential Science Adviser John Marburger, Hackett's research experiences should be valuable.

Hackett earned a B.A. in Social Relations from Colgate and a M.A. and Ph.D. in Sociology from Cornell. He replaces Richard Lempert, who has led the division for the past four years. Hackett will begin his new position on July 1, 2006.

Sandra Schneider, currently Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship in the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Cognitive and Neural Sciences in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Florida (USF), will take over as director of the Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences division. She has also been the co-interim director of USF's Humanities Institute. Schneider is a former NSF program officer in the Decision, Risk, and Management Sciences Program.

Her research interests include risk behavior, decision making, and sex offenders. She has been active in motivating women to enter scientific endeavors. Schneider has been a member of the Executive Board

of the Society for Judgment and Decision Making, as well as on the editorial board of the society's journal.

All three of Schneider's degrees are from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her Ph.D. is in Experimental Psychology. She will replace Marguerite 'Peg' Barratt, who has led the division for the past four years. Schneider begins her new job on July 17.

In other SBE personnel shifts: Mark Weiss has returned to NSF after serving as the Assistant Director for the Social and Behavioral Sciences at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. Weiss will now serve as Senior Adviser to David Lightfoot. Frank Scioli, who for many years served as Program Officer for the Political Science program, is now the Senior Adviser to the Social and Economic Sciences Division. Scioli spent much of the last year as SBE's representative to NSF's Office of Cyberinfrastructure, a position soon to be filled by Terence Langendoen, Professor of Linguistics Emeritus at the University of Arizona.

CRIME PREVENTION SYMPOSIUM EXAMINES SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

On May 2, the sixth annual Jerry Lee Crime Prevention symposium featured the work of the Campbell Collaboration systematic reviews of evidence to examine "Developing Effective Crime Prevention Policies: Evidence and Controversies." Jerry Lee is a Philadelphia radio station owner who has endowed a foundation that sponsors research to help produce evidence-based policy in crime and education. (for more information about the Campbell Collaboration go to :www.campbellcollaboration.org).

The symposium heard from both Regina Schofield, the current Assistant Attorney General (AAG) for the Office of Justice Programs, and former AAG Assistant Attorney General Laurie Robinson, now director of the Master's program at the Jerry Lee Center of Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania. Both stressed the importance of measuring the effectiveness of programs in an era of tight budgets and educating consumers, particularly criminal justice practitioners, about the value of the research.

Katy Crooks of the House Judiciary Committee also reminded the audience about the value of educating members of Congress.

One symposium panel heard from Cynthia Lum from George Mason University, who conducted a systematic review of research on the effectiveness of counter-terrorism strategies. Lum found only seven studies of the 20,000 plus works related to terrorism that met the “rigorous” criteria of the Campbell systematic reviews. She suggested that “target hardening” strategies had some effect. Although she wondered about displacement effects, e.g. that airport screening had pretty much eliminated skyjacking, but the terrorists had moved on to other techniques such as assassinations, suicide bombings, and hostage taking. She suggested the studies indicated that measures such as severe punishment, military retaliation, and U.N. resolutions were not particularly effective.

Commenting on Lum’s presentation, Gary LaFree, director of the Homeland Security Center of Excellence for Behavioral and Social Research on Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism at the University of Maryland, noted the difficulties of simply gathering data on the subject. He cited a definition of policy that goes beyond the “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” problem. The U.N. has difficulty differentiating between a military activity, an insurgency, and terrorism, he suggested. Another problem is that many activities and government strategies in this area are classified and researchers have difficulty penetrating government secrecy. Finally, LaFree noted that with terrorism we are dealing with a “rare events problem” and drawing generalizations for policy advice are not easy.

LaFree’s comments were echoed by Simon Perry from the Embassy of Israel. Perry, who is the Brigadier General Attache and Liaison Officer to the U.S. and Canada, noted that tactics for combating terrorism are “not so simple” and are always reinventing themselves. They are not put on paper for researchers to investigate and sometimes they succeed in stopping events. For example, Perry noted that recently Israel has intercepted 96 percent of potential suicide attacks.

In another panel that examined police-led drug enforcement strategies, both Thom Feucht of the National Institute of Justice and Chuck Wexler of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) urged researchers to focus on the police policy audience. Feucht wondered how police chiefs would interpret the findings that geographically-focused, problem-oriented policing in partnership with third parties were most

effective at reducing street-level drug markets. Wexler warned about unintended consequences from attempts to clean up drug markets, such as relocation of the market.

The symposium also included a session at the University of Maryland that examined the problems and prospects for using the meta-analysis techniques of the Campbell Collaboration to assess evidence in crime and justice.

MEPS: A KEY RESOURCE FOR HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH AND DATA

On May 3 the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) held their second biennial conference, providing information on several preliminary research aspects of health policy ranging from health care costs and insurance coverage to patterns of prescription drug use and expenditures in the Medicare population. These and the other research studies presented highlighted the financial burdens of chronic disease, changes in the demand for mental health treatment, and the reasons why some workers decline employer coverage. The commonality each of the studies shared is that they used data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS).

MEPS, a nationally representative survey of households, collects detailed information on health status, health care use and expenses, and health insurance coverage of individuals and families in the U.S civilian population. MEPS provides policy makers, health care administrators, businesses, and others with timely information to use in policy-related and behavioral research on the determinants of health care use, spending, and insurance coverage and to improve the accuracy of economic projections.

Data collection for MEPS began in 1996. Carolyn Clancy, AHRQ director calls it “a critical source of information.” Federal agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and Department of the Treasury (DOT), all used MEPS data to determine estimates of private nongroup health insurance coverage premiums.

Decisionmakers at all levels of the government and in the private sector use MEPS data on health care use and spending, insurance coverage, and accessibility of care

for the U.S. population and subgroups of policy interest. In addition, state governments are using data on health insurance from the MEPS Insurance Component to study ways of expanding insurance coverage by coordinating public subsidies with private job-based coverage.

The MEPS includes four components: Household (HC), Nursing Home (NHC), Medical (MC) and Insurance (IC), that are essential to help provide the answers to a number of health questions. A variety of print and electronic products are generated from the data collected through MEPS: public use data files; statistical tables; periodic data reports; short data summaries; and other research publications.

In the latest MEPS statistical brief (#124) the persistence in the level of health expenditures over time was examined using information from the Household Component of MEPS. It provides detailed estimates of the persistence in the level of health care expenditures between 2002 and 2003 in order to help discern the factors most likely to drive health care spending and the characteristics of the individuals who incur them.

To provide immediate access to the MEPS data in a non-programming environment, MEPSnet an interactive statistical tool was developed. MEPSnet is a unique addition to MEPS, reaffirming that it is a key resource for health policy research. For more information on MEPS visit www.meps.ahrq.gov.

NCHS BOARD OF SCIENTIFIC COUNSELORS CONVENE

On May 4-5 the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Board of Scientific Counselors held its second meeting of the year. The impact of Hurricane Katrina on vital statistics and NCHS surveys were among the key topics of discussion. Stephanie J. Ventura of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided the Board with a summary of the details.

According to Ventura, Hurricane Katrina impacted three of NCHS survey programs: the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), the National Immunization Survey (NIS) and the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS).

The NHIS's main objective is to monitor the health of the United States population through the collection and analysis of data on a broad range of health topics. The Survey has the ability to display these health characteristics by many demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

Used widely throughout the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), NHIS data monitors trends in illness and disability and tracks progress toward achieving national health objectives. Ventura explained that Katrina influenced the NHIS's ability to specifically identify displaced persons in households, resulting in a loss of 435 interviews in three states thru the end of 2005.

Interrupted by a total of four hurricanes, of which Katrina had the longest impact, the NIS study was unable to conduct interviewing for a total of 93 days in Southern Louisiana and Mississippi. Ventura explained that Katrina contributed to the loss of immunization provider records and missing data models for the affected areas. The NIS operates in two parts: a household telephone survey, which asks questions about childhood immunization for children 19-35 months of age; and the survey of vaccination providers, which is a survey of doctors and other vaccination.

“Although the central vital statistics offices located in New Orleans were not destroyed by Katrina, they became inaccessible,” Ventura noted. Statistics offices were temporarily relocated to Baton Rouge said Ventura, with less than one-half of pre-Katrina Louisiana staff on board. Eventually the office reopened in Metairie, LA.

Using the same Random-Digit-Dial (RDD) telephone design approach and sampling frame as the NIS, SLAITS collects important health care data at state and local levels. SLAITS uses standardized questions to produce comparative data across states and for the Nation and addresses state-specific data needs with customized questions and specific domains of interest. Questions specific to Hurricane Katrina were later added to the Survey.

Ventura did share some progress made in the areas of devastation, concluding that statistics offices in Louisiana are now able to provide certified copies of vital records and that vital statistic offices in Mississippi and Alabama are functioning.

The NCHS Board of Scientific Counselors provides advice and makes recommendations to the Secretary; Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Director, National Center for Health

Statistics (NCHS), regarding the scientific and technical program goals and objectives, strategies, and priorities of NCHS. The next meeting is scheduled for September 14-15, 2006.

UNDERSTANDING MECHANISMS OF HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), many of the risky behaviors of the 21st century result from voluntary behaviors such as unhealthy eating habits, the use of tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs, and the failure to be physically active, maintain a healthy weight, or use safety equipment. Health risk behaviors, once considered the result of faulty decision making, impulsive behavior, or characteristics of psychosocial development, are recognized as dynamic conditions (some with genetic predispositions) evolving across the lifespan.

The agency emphasizes that little research has been focused on understanding the mechanisms and contextual factors responsible for the process of behavior change. A biopsychosocial approach to the investigation of the mechanisms of health risk behavior change will explore the multiple spheres of influence provided by the individual, family, community, and society.

The NIH invites grant proposals that will enhance the understanding of the factors and mechanisms that determine changes in health risk behaviors during childhood and adolescence (PA-06-298). The agency seeks interdisciplinary research to explore the biological, genetic, physiological, psychological, and social/environmental factors and mechanisms that influence health risk behavior change in childhood and adolescent.

The concept of health risk behavior change is used in the program announcement to encompass the evolution of specific health impairing behaviors. The participating institutes are particularly interested in factors and processes that influence the initiation, continuation, and/or cessation of one or more of the following health risk behaviors (1) substance abuse, (2) inadequate exercise and poor dietary practices as they relate to being overweight or obese, and (3) intentional and unintentional injuries.

Studies of interest may be observational, epidemiological, interventional, secondary data analyses, and cost/benefit analyses.

A multidisciplinary approach is encouraged and research findings from fields such as developmental pediatrics, psychology, behavioral science, neuroscience, neuropsychology, business, education, public policy, and others will be considered.

Applicants are encouraged to expand upon current theories of behavior change and to consider techniques, strategies, and other models such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, motivational interviewing, feedback interventions, contingency management, social marketing, innovation diffusion, behavioral extinction, behavioral momentum/choice theory, contingency management techniques, behavioral economics, models of decision making, and goal-directed behaviors.

The institutes and offices participating in the program announcement include: Child Health and Human Development; Cancer; Heart, Lung, and Blood; Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Drug Abuse; Nursing; Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research; and the Office of Dietary Supplements.

For more information see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-298.html>.

NIH SEEKS PROPOSALS ON DISPARITIES IN HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

The relationship of race/ethnicity to health disparities is complex. The recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report on unequal treatment as well as several other recent reviews shows that racial/ethnic minorities less frequently receive appropriate care which has an adverse impact on their health outcomes including higher recurrence rates, morbidity, and mortality.

The IOM report concluded in part that:

- racial/ethnic health disparities in health care occur in the context of broader historic and contemporary social and economic inequality and evidence of persistent racial and ethnic discrimination in many sectors of American life,
- health systems, health care providers, patients, and utilization managers may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in health care, and
- health provider bias, stereotyping, prejudice, and clinical uncertainty may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in care.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) seeks research proposals designed to:

- Improve the measurement of racial/ethnic discrimination in health care delivery systems through improved instrumentation, data collection and statistical/analytical techniques;
- To enhance understanding of the influence of racial/ethnic discrimination in health care delivery and its association with disparities in disease incidence, treatment and outcomes among disadvantaged racial/ethnic minority groups; and
- To reduce the prevalence of racial/ethnic health disparities through the development of interventions to reduce the influence of racial/ethnic discrimination on health care delivery systems in the U.S.

The announcement (PA-06-348) specifically encourages:

- Descriptive and analytical studies that examine racial/ethnic discrimination as a risk factor for racial/ethnic disparities in disease incidence, treatment, and outcomes;
- The development of data resources including the identification and/or development of new data collection modalities and the evaluation of existing data collection instruments/modalities;
- Studies that examine factors that influence patient experiences and perception of racial/ethnically biased health care and its relationship to trust of health care providers and its influence on the future utilization of health care services including compliance with provider recommendations, delays in seeking care, and continuity in care.
- Studies that examine the impact of health delivery system practices and policies such as patient “dumping,” Medicare nursing care bed certification limits, privatization, closure or relocation of public hospitals, or other policies that may adversely impact the supply of racial/ethnic minority health care providers and how this might relate to racial/ethnic disparities in access to care, health status and outcomes.

Participating NIH institutes and offices include: Cancer; Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research; Heart, Lung and Blood; Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering; and Drug Abuse. For more information see: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-06-348.html>.

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