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CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

# COSSA WASHINGTON UPDATE

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## FEIN URGES HHS-WIDE ATTENTION TO HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH

Appearing for the Consortium before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies, chaired by Sen. Lowell Weicker (R-CT), Rashi Fein, Professor of the Economics of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, spoke for more attention to and a better balance in health services research across a wide range of agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services. The hearing took place on May 6.

Fein pointed out that "health care is a \$400 billion industry that absorbs over 10% of the nation's product, strains budgets in the public sector, reduces wages and profit in the private sector, [and] puts us in a less favorable competitive position in international trade...." Arguing "health care is too large and too important to be left to...physicians, hospitals, or insurance companies," and "we are a very long way...from a situation in which knowledgeable and sovereign consumers face a competitive market characterized by ease of entry and competition," Fein asserted "there is the need to understand far better than we do how [the health care system] is evolving and with what effects on the distribution of care, quality, and dollar costs." Since the federal government alone is spending over \$100 billion a year, "social science research on health care services is an investment."

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Risa I. Palm, *President*

David Jenness, *Executive Director*

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Fein emphasized the need for both extramural and intramural research. Since government "is a big player whose actions... affect the whole field of health care, it simply is inappropriate...to rely exclusively on government to evaluate the consequences of its own actions." Further, government is preoccupied with dollars and cost-containment. "[As] vital as these are," Fein observed, "the agenda for health care services must...include quality, variations in practice patterns, the impact of different delivery modalities and of different payment and insurance patterns...much of the analytical efforts falls in the domains of the social sciences, requires skills other than economics, and techniques that do not focus on expenditures alone."

At the same time, Fein stressed the importance of a strong intramural research capacity, saying that the combination of extra- and intramural research systems results in "better and more useful and pointed research and in an increase in government's ability to apply the results." In addition, there are important data that must be collected and analyzed centrally, not by researchers with individual grants or by private industry. Fein pointed out that the last National Medical Expenditure Survey was done in 1977, and held that it was urgent that another survey be undertaken in the next two to three years by the National Center for Health Services Research, which he characterized as "a treasure...built over a period of years."

COSSA's witness noted the importance of encouraging the NIH agencies to support research that cuts across the various social science disciplines in asking basic questions about health care, services, organization, finance, and status. Mentioning the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute on Aging specifically, he commented that "the utility of the National Medical Expenditure Survey could be enhanced if NIA could buy into that survey and by adding dollars at the margin make certain that the survey generates enough information about the needs of the elderly."

Fein also urged that research be undertaken on local variations in practice patterns in medical care (e.g., widely differing rates of surgical procedures in adjacent communities) and the consequences of such variation in terms of both longterm health and medical expense.

Following his testimony, Professor Fein and COSSA staff met with staff of Sen. William Proxmire (D-WI), the ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee, to discuss a bill introduced by the Senator (S. 2114) on health outcomes research which calls for small area analysis and related approaches to studying the phenomenon. (See Update, April 4, 1986.)

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JENNESS CALLS AIDS BUDGET FOR PREVENTION "GROTESQUELY INADEQUATE"

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On May 5 COSSA Executive Director David Jenness appeared before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies, chaired by William Natcher (D-KY), to protest what he computed to be no more than 1% of the federal AIDS budget being spent, in FY 1986 and in the administration's proposed FY 1987 budget, on research-based public education and prevention. Jenness said, "It is difficult to exaggerate the vastness and complexity of the problems with which our entire society must struggle in the face of AIDS. Federal support for biomedical research has...been of paramount importance. But the federal record of support for non-biomedical research critical to the resolution of the AIDS crisis is not even remotely comparable....Most experts agree that until biomedical research achieves ways to prevent or contain AIDS, the most powerful weapon to stem the tide of the epidemic will be found in focused public education and persuasion."

In recent months, the COSSA staff has been working to stimulate social and behavioral scientists to coordinate and focus their research efforts, and together with other groups has been moving to bring to the attention of the Institute of Medicine, the Surgeon General of the United States, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Health in the Department of Health and Human Services, and other official groups and authorities the possible contributions of research from the social and behavioral science community. Jenness' statement was to some extent developed in consultation with experts in the social medicine and public health fields.

Jenness held that "passive education -- just putting the facts before the public -- will not work. This is especially true when 'the facts' are stated vaguely and euphemistically, for reasons we all understand." He alluded to research by psychologists on the (mis)calculation by individuals of personal risk; by sociologists on the steps by which persuasion succeeds; and by anthropologists on how messages are conveyed in specific cultural groups. He pointed out, however, the significant successes social and behavioral scientists have had in public health campaigns, where broadscale public information has been combined with the use of personal networks and voluntary associations and with direct intervention. While largely deploring the concept of "large undifferentiated 'at risk' groups," Jenness touched on special difficulties or opportunities with particular target communities. "We cannot reach the minority teenagers, the social isolate, the persons who read and speak other languages, affluent teenagers who think it can't happen to them, without the full knowledge that social scientists have gained from research."

Jenness also focused on reaching public leaders and officials who are called on to make crucial decisions for the public good: school boards, employers, public health officials, police and the courts, those who run social services, et al.

Jenness argued not only for building on what has been established by social science research for public education and prevention, but urged a major commitment to research on "social intervention" within the context of the AIDS crisis. He referred to past episodes in public health, and to the well-established research tradition of the study of voluntarism in this society. "Organizations that give support need support from the political system as well as from the local community. Do we know how to encourage and sustain such groups, not just in the gay community but, for example, on the university campus or in the workplace?" He urged a program of multidisciplinary research -- "an integration of efforts from the social and behavioral sciences and all parts of medicine, of the laboratory and the clinic with those working in the field and in the community" -- and held that such an effort must be the responsibility of all NIH and other Public Health Service agencies engaged in work on AIDS.

Informal responses to Jenness' statement by Chairman Natcher and by Rep. Silvio Conte (R-MA) suggested that the Subcommittee intended to bring in "a good bill."

#### SENATE PASSES BUDGET RESOLUTION: INCREASES SCIENCE FUNCTION

The FY 1987 budget resolution passed by the Senate early in the morning of May 2 includes significant increases in the Science Function (#250) that may make it easier to achieve the proposed increase for the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the coming fiscal year. The Budget Resolution, which under the new timetable of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings was supposed to be passed on April 15, provides spending guidelines in broad categories for the authorization and appropriations committees which decide the funding of specific programs.

The Science Function is increased by \$200 million in FY 1987 outlays above the level set by the Senate Budget Committee (see Update, April 4, 1986). Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA), Chairman of the Science, Technology, and Space Subcommittee, made it clear that the extra money should not be used only to support increased funding for NASA. In a colloquy on the Senate floor with Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-NM), Gorton asked: "Is this \$200 million in outlays earmarked in any way for specific programs or agencies within Function 250, or would it be available to the Appropriations Committee to be allocated to programs within the function...For example, could some of this additional \$200 million be allocated to the National Science Foundation as well as NASA?" Domenici noted that "the Senator is correct."

The House Budget Committee is expected to markup its budget resolution on May 8 or 9. After all the dire warnings stimulated by GRH it appears that the budget resolution may open the door for an FY 1987 NSF budget that includes the proposed increase. How much of an increase will depend on the appropriations committees.

COSSA WITNESSES SEEK HIGHER BUDGET AT NSF

In two appearances before congressional subcommittees witnesses representing COSSA urged that 5% of research funds distributed by the National Science Foundation (NSF) go to social and behavioral science research. Currently only 4% of NSF funds go to these sciences.

Joseph Grimes, Professor of Linguistics at Cornell University, testified on April 30 before the Senate HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Jake Garn (R-UT). Reflecting the priorities of NSF Director Erich Bloch, Professor Grimes discussed the contributions of the social and behavioral sciences to the economic competitiveness and security of the nation. Referring to his own research (which "broke new ground by studying the language of entire discourses: how different the ways are in which various languages set up arguments or explanations or instructions or even simple narratives"), Grimes noted that this work is now being used to teach foreign languages to foreign trade negotiators, international businessmen, and diplomats. He also talked about the development of a "truly comprehensive kind of dictionary" and his use of Cornell's supercomputer to simulate language dynamics.

Professor Grimes' written testimony referred to many other examples of the contributions the social and behavioral sciences have made to economic competitiveness and security. He also supported the total proposed budget for NSF in FY 1987 and called for greater funding for the Science and Engineering Education Directorate at NSF.

William V. D'Antonio, Executive Officer of the American Sociological Association and Chairman of the COSSA Executive Committee, represented COSSA before the House HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations Committee, chaired by Rep. Edward Boland (D-MA), on May 6. Now Professor Emeritus at the University of Connecticut, D'Antonio focused on examples of the cross-disciplinary effort over the past 30 years that has created the knowledge base on population dynamics to aid the nations of the underdeveloped world to understand the impact of population policy on economic growth, education, and social policies. He also discussed the impact of social science research on the revolution in labor-management relations in the automobile industry. According to D'Antonio it "was a shame that the Japanese and the Swedes paid attention to this research earlier than our American companies." D'Antonio argued that these two major examples, as well as many others, of the contributions of the social and behavioral sciences to America's economic competitiveness and security justify a larger share of the NSF budget.

Preceding D'Antonio in the witness chair at the House Subcommittee hearings were Representatives Don Fuqua (D-FL) and Doug Walgren (D-PA). Fuqua, Chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, and Walgren, Chairman of the Science,

Research, and Technology Subcommittee, strongly endorsed the increase proposed for NSF. Walgren noted that his Subcommittee had reallocated \$7 million from the Antarctic program to the social and behavioral sciences and the science and engineering education program.

The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees are not expected to mark up their bills until the Budget Resolution situation has been clarified.

#### HEARINGS HELD ON THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF GENERATIONS

The House Select Committee on Aging was the setting for the release of a report by the Gerontological Society of America (GSA), "The Common Stake: The Interdependence of Generations (A Policy Framework for an Aging Society)". On April 8, 1986, the Select Committee, chaired by Edward R. Roybal (D-CA), held a hearing entitled "Investing in America's Families - The Common Bond of Generations," which served as an occasion for the release of the GSA report. Witnesses for the hearing were: Joseph Giordano, a physician at George Washington University Hospital; Humphrey Taylor, President of Louis Harris Associates; Mary Bourdette, Director of Government Affairs, Children's Defense Fund; Eric Kingson, University of Maryland-Baltimore, Project Director for the GSA's Emerging Issues Program and primary author of the report; and Paul S. Hewitt, President, Americans for Generational Equity.

The GSA study and resulting report are aimed at reframing the current public policy debate connected with the aging of the U.S. population. The debate revolves around the belief of many Americans that the government is currently spending too much for the elderly and widely accepted population projections which indicate that the percentage of U.S. citizens who are 65 or older will increase from the current 12% to approximately 21% over the next 45 years. The study was undertaken both to document the appropriateness of current expenditures and to offer research evidence for positive implications of an aging population.

In recent years a group of analysts has emerged who argue that social budget policy should be made in light of 'intergenerational equity.' They hold that the elderly currently receive too large a share of scarce federal resources at the expense of the health and living standards of children. Some proponents of this view also argue that the large budgetary deficits which have developed in this decade stem from the pattern of favoring the elderly, and that today's children will be strapped with overwhelming debt-service payments in the next century. In arguing for decreases and/or modifications in Social Security and other programs, they claim that a dramatic drop in the poverty rate among the elderly and a concurrent, nearly equal, increase in the poverty rate among children are closely related.

The GSA report presents four primary considerations:

1) Use of Demographic Data: Interpretation of population projections must include assumptions about economic growth, and productivity of the elderly. Policy considerations should be based on a full 'dependency ratio' (i.e., of workforce earners to youthful, aged, and other dependents) rather than an 'aged dependency ratio' (i.e., a ratio based solely on workforce earners to aged dependents). Using GSA's assumptions, even at the height of the projected retirement of the 'baby boomers' in 2030, the dependency ratio will be lower than in the 1960s.

2) Interdependence of Generations: Noting that 50 years ago the framers of Social Security realized that "old age pensions are in a real sense measures in behalf of children" (i.e., Social Security frees up younger and middle-aged family members to concentrate more of their financial resources on children), expenditures by various generations from all sources should be looked at rather than only federal social expenditures.

3) Family Care: Contrary to popular belief, families have not abandoned the elderly. The GSA analysis shows the elderly receiving 80% to 90% of necessary services from their families.

4) Diversity of the Elderly: The elderly population is healthier than commonly assumed and is composed of different groups of different ages that are economically diverse. Some groups -- particularly widows, the very old, and minorities -- have very high poverty rates. Statistics on dramatic drops in the poverty rate should be tempered by looking at the aged clustered just above the poverty line (the near-poor).

With the exception of Hewitt, the witnesses were supportive of the interdependence concept. Humphrey Taylor reported on a re-analysis of over 20 Harris polls conducted over the last two years in which differences in attitudes toward federal policies and potential policies were examined. Comparing data from different age groups on attitudes toward Social Security, Medicare, education, and health -- all of which showed consensus across generations -- Taylor contended that the intergenerational conflict theory was refuted, at least as applied to social spending.

Corrections. In the April 25, 1986 issue of Update there were two errors. In a story on the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the Department of Education, reference was made to a panel of the Committee on National Statistics studying the quality of education statistics. Professor F. Thomas Juster was said to be chairman; while he is a member, the chair is ex-Census director, Vincent P. Barabba.

In the story on National Research Service Awards, it was reported that applicants must have had the Ph.D. or equivalent degree for seven years. That is true only of Senior Fellowships. For other NRSAs, applicants must have the degree by the time the proposed fellowship begins.

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