
CONSORTIUM of SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

COSSA WASHINGTON UPDATE

Volume VIII, Number 5
March 17, 1989

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HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEES SCRUTINIZE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

For three successive days beginning March 14, two House subcommittees examined the programs of the National Science Foundation (NSF). For the first time in quite a while, House members took a specific look at the status and funding of the social and behavioral sciences. On March 14, the Science, Research and Technology (SRT) Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Doug Walgren (D-PA), heard a Nobel laureate, a former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), and a former assistant secretary of a federal agency advocate the value of social and behavioral science research. The next day, the HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, under Rep. Bob Traxler (D-MI), its new chairman, grilled NSF Director Erich Bloch on the Foundation's FY 1990 budget request. And on March 16, Bloch appeared before the SRT Subcommittee for a general oversight hearing. Each of the hearings is discussed below.

Simon, Schultze, Gorham Back Social, Behavioral Research Funding

At the March 14 SRT Subcommittee hearing, Chairman Walgren heard from Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon of Carnegie-Mellon University, former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), Charles Schultze of the Brookings Institution, and former Health, Education, and Welfare Assistant Secretary William Gorham, now president of the Urban Institute. All three

COSSA Washington Update is published 20-24 times per year, normally biweekly, by the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), 1625 I Street, NW, Suite 911, Washington, D.C. 20006 (202/887-6166). Individual subscriptions are available from COSSA for \$50.00; institutional subscriptions, \$90.00; overseas airmail, \$90.00. ISSN 0749-4394. COSSA Members, Affiliates, and Contributors are listed on the back. The **Update** is written and produced by the Consortium's staff: Howard J. Silver, Stacey E. Beckhardt, Brian Daly, and Katrina R. Styles.

The Consortium represents more than 185,000 American scientists across the full range of the social and behavioral sciences, functioning as a bridge between the research world and the Washington community.

Raymond E. Wolfinger, *President*

Howard J. Silver, *Executive Director*

witnesses deplored the inadequate funding situation for the social and behavioral sciences at NSF. In making their case, each pointed to specific examples of social and behavioral research contributions to dealing with the complex problems facing the nation.

Simon, referring to charts prepared for the hearings, noted that in constant dollars, NSF budgets for the social and behavioral sciences have declined more than 30% in the 1980s -- a period in which the total NSF budget grew some 30% in constant dollars. He suggested, "Clearly, the National Science Foundation has little vision of the important contributions the social sciences can make to our society, or of the exciting questions they are answering."

To ensure adequate NSF support for the social and behavioral sciences, Simon called for a separation of the Biological, Behavioral and Social Sciences Directorate into its two natural parts. He also called for the appointment of a new assistant director for the envisioned Behavioral and Social Sciences Directorate who could be "fully effective" as an advocate for these disciplines and who could serve as a "central participant in budget decisions" at the Foundation.

Simon suggested that the National Academy of Sciences' report, The Behavioral and Social Sciences: Achievements and Opportunities, provides examples of "the intellectual excitement of the field and its significance to society" (see Update, March 18, 1988). Noting that social science research is rarely "glamorous," Simon cited a study of unwed mothers conducted by sociologists at the University of Pennsylvania as representing "the kinds of hard facts that we need in order to understand adolescent pregnancy and to address the problems that it creates for both the actors and society."

Schultze focused on the contributions of economic research to improved understanding of how the economy works and, as a consequence, how this has led to better economic policy. Echoing Simon, Schultze noted that "the gradual and persistent accumulation of useful knowledge is what we should expect from economic and social research." Citing historical examples to buttress his argument, the former CEA chairman suggested that economic research helps policy-makers and the general public understand how monetary and fiscal policy ought to behave when the economy is threatened by a recession. That increased understanding has led to more than 40 years of relative economic stability, he said.

Furthermore, noting the work of recent Nobel Laureate Robert Solow, Edward Denison and others, Schultze argued that economic research has provided the impetus for a national investment strategy (including a research and development tax credit) to increase productivity and competitiveness. He also cited work on

the nature and structure of welfare dependency, unemployment, and employment as further examples of the contributions of social science research to the understanding of the economy.

Schultze suggested that future research in the microeconomics of productivity, particularly at the firm and industry level, offers potential for useful information for both business managers and public policy-makers. These would include research on how workers are paid, the impact of the quality of management, and why business imitates some technological advances more easily than others. If these examinations of "the nuts and bolts and detailed underpinning of comparative productivity performance" could improve the rate of American productivity growth by one-tenth of one percent a year for five years, Schultze noted, "the annual addition to our national income and output would pay for the entire NSF budget 15 times over" (Schultze's emphasis). Other areas for future exploration cited by Schultze are: the noninflationary level of unemployment and explanations of the U.S. trade deficit.

Gorham's testimony focused on the uses of NSF-sponsored research. He looked at how a particular set of analytical techniques and data bases developed by grant-supported social scientists "have dramatically increased the power of other social scientists and policy analysts to understand social and economic phenomena and to analyze and predict the effects of policies aimed at changing them" (Gorham's emphasis). He further noted that administrators and legislators have come to expect and rely on large amounts of sophisticated information provided by policy analysts during the past 20 years. In turn, the policy analysts rely on the basic social science and methodological research supported by NSF. Thus, the policy analysts serve as the "link between basic research and the ultimate beneficiaries [policy-makers] of that research."

As examples, Gorham cited the Urban Institute's studies on the homeless, the medically uninsured, teenage mothers, young crack dealers, and very elderly women -- research which "would have been impossible but for the pioneering analytical work carried out under an NSF behavioral and social sciences grant" that allowed "reasonable confidence in the results of survey data." Gorham also suggested that NSF-supported work on selection bias made it possible to evaluate government programs at a fraction of the cost of the social experiments previously used for evaluation purposes.

Traxler Cites COSSA; NSF Funding At Issue

At the March 15 hearing of the House HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, Chairman Bob Traxler (D-MI) cited the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) when he raised the issue of social and behavioral science funding at NSF. Referring to a COSSA letter, Traxler inquired whether the

relatively small increase for these disciplines in the proposed FY 1990 NSF budget signaled a de-emphasis of the agency's support for social and behavioral science research. (A 7.5% increase is proposed for these disciplines, while the Foundation's overall budget would increase 14%.)

Mary Clutter, assistant director for NSF's Biological, Behavioral and Social Science Directorate, denied any plan to de-emphasize the social sciences. Rather, she suggested the Foundation is making special efforts to integrate these disciplines into the rest of NSF. She cited the proposal for research on the human dimensions of global change (see "Sources of Research Support, Update, January 13, 1989) as an example of this attempt at integration.

Clutter also suggested that from FY 1982 to FY 1988, the behavioral and social science budgets at NSF had grown by 84.1%, compared to a 49.6% increase for the overall budget for research and related activities. Since the Subcommittee was rushing through its review (one and a half days of scheduled hearings were being compressed into one day), no one challenged the figures she cited. These figures cover the period following what even Erich Bloch has called the "decimating" cuts in the first Reagan budget (see next story). If one goes back to 1980, as Simon and Schultze did (see previous story) as a way of measuring the impact of the Reagan years, the increases disappear in current dollars, while constant-dollar decreases are close to 30%.

The rest of the Subcommittee review revealed: NSF's continuing failure to seek funding for the authorized facilities program; continued skepticism of the Science and Technology Centers program among Subcommittee members; continued interest in the improvement of science education, especially at the pre-college level; increased frustration at the lack of women and minorities in science and engineering; and a revelation by National Science Board Chairman Mary Good that foreign students being educated in American graduate schools are returning home in greater numbers than in previous years.

Chairman Traxler noted the difficulty the Subcommittee faces in allocating funds among the worthwhile competing programs under its jurisdiction (housing, environment, space, veterans), and said that unless the Subcommittee's allocation from the full appropriations committee (the 302B process) is increased from \$43 billion to \$50 billion, the NSF budget request faces likely reductions. Traxler asked NSF to supply the Subcommittee with contingency plans for various funding-cut scenarios.

Bloch: Social Sciences Well-Treated at NSF

Responding to Rep. David Price's (D-NC) assertion that NSF appears to assign a "relatively low priority to the behavioral and social sciences," Bloch testified on March 16 that although

these disciplines were indeed "decimated" in previous years, they are "well treated" by the Foundation. Bloch, who spoke before Chairman Walgren's SRT Subcommittee, also noted his strong belief that the "behavioral and social sciences have a lot to offer" and are "part of the science picture."

Bloch repeated some of the same figures cited by Clutter at the previous day's appropriations hearing (see previous story). Bloch also told Price that social scientists needed to look to other areas of the federal government for support. Citing NSF's decision, risk and management science program, Bloch also underscored the need to look to cooperation with industry as a way to boost funding. In addition, he suggested (with COSSA in mind?) that groups representing the disciplines (including those outside the social and behavioral sciences) are never satisfied.

Neither was Walgren, who kept pressing Bloch to tell him what NSF "should" be doing, not what it "could" afford to do. Recognizing the realities of the appropriations process, Walgren nonetheless suggested that answering the "should" question was the proper role of the authorizing committee. Bloch did admit that the administration's FY 1990 proposed budget for NSF was \$50 million less than NSF's budget request to the Office of Management and Budget.

Most of the remainder of the well-attended hearing focused on science education and concern over America losing its scientific and technological leadership.<<

HEADS ROLL AT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

On March 14, President Bush accepted the resignations of six Reagan appointees at the Department of Education. Of particular interest is the resignation of Patricia Mayes Hines, assistant secretary for Educational Research and Improvement. Hines' recess appointment was criticized by many leading education and research groups concerned about her lack of experience in research and research management.

Other staff who will be leaving their posts are LeGree Daniels, assistant secretary for Civil Rights; Beryl Dorsett, assistant secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education; Patrick Pizella, deputy under-secretary for the Office of Management (a recess appointment); Kenneth Whitehead, assistant secretary for Postsecondary Education (a recess appointment); and Madeleine Will, assistant secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

All resignations are effective March 23; there is no word yet on new appointments.<<

KOOP REASSERTS CLAIM THAT PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON ABORTION FLAWED

In a House subcommittee hearing on March 16, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop elaborated on why he and other top health officials decided against releasing a report on the psychological impact of abortion on women. The hearing, held before the Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Ted Weiss (D-NY), also set the stage for a lengthy debate on the soundness of the research data so far collected on the topic.

The report in question was requested by President Reagan in 1987 and was expected to address the psychological effects of abortion on women. Information for the report was compiled for more than a year, and a wide range of experts -- both pro-life and pro-choice -- were consulted by Koop and his staff. The report was completed in January, but not released; instead, Koop submitted a letter to the Reagan administration stating that the research conducted in this area was too flawed to be used in drawing any serious conclusions.

Koop reiterated this message at the March 16 hearing, noting, among other things, that: the current research is plagued by methodological difficulties inherent in the topic at hand; it is widely believed that approximately half of all women who have undergone abortions will deny they have done so; there is a paucity of long-term followup data; and there is a notable lack of consensus among experts. In sum, Koop said he did not believe a report compiled using such data could stand up to scientific scrutiny. Attempts to conduct a more reliable study on this issue, Koop said, would face formidable scientific, methodological, and statistical challenges. When asked about Reagan's intentions in requesting the report, Koop responded that if the President or any of his aides believed that a problem as complex as abortion could be solved by highlighting its adverse psychological effects, they were mistaken.

Koop strongly argued that the federal government must encourage frank education campaigns aimed at reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies among teenagers. While such education should stress "family values," Koop made it clear that contraception must also be on the agenda, since so many of the young are already sexually active. When asked about what stage of a child's development is appropriate for discussing sex, Koop replied that with regard to such matters, "we have always been too late in assuming the proper age."

Earlier in the hearings, witnesses, sometimes citing the same studies, disagreed in their interpretations of current research findings on abortion's possible psychological effects on women.

Nancy Adler of the Department of Health Psychology at the University of California at San Francisco, testified that while

some women do experience psychological difficulties after undergoing an abortion, these instances are sporadic. By the same token, Adler, who testified on behalf of the American Psychological Association, said research shows that for the majority of women who undergo the procedure, abortion proves less stressful than carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term.

Wanda Franz, vice president of the National Right to Life Committee and associate professor of psychology at West Virginia University, noted, as Koop did later in the day, that even the best studies in the field are flawed. She listed as an example the tendency of many researchers to conduct interviews immediately or shortly after the abortion has occurred, when the subject is quite naturally relieved of the burden of the unwanted pregnancy. It is later, Franz said, that psychological problems can arise, oftentimes taking the form of severe depression, nightmares, and feelings of worthlessness. Just how many women experience such problems was an issue of much debate among witnesses at the hearing.<<

SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE TACKLES SCIENCE PRIORITIES

At a March 9 hearing of the Senate Budget Committee, chaired by James Sasser (D-TN), Congress continued its consideration of the need to set priorities in science and technology, and of the impact of such priorities on economic policy. "Our scientific and technological base underpins our economy," Sasser announced at the well-attended hearing. "Setting research priorities is not only important from the budget perspective, it is also central to maintaining our economic strength and military power."

Many of the issues and concerns presented in testimony echoed those discussed at recent hearings of the House Science, Research, and Technology Subcommittee (see Update, March 3, 1989). The release of Federal Science and Technology Priorities: New Perspectives and Procedures, a congressionally mandated report of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine, has become a prime catalyst for such congressional attention. In his testimony, NAS President Frank Press highlighted the recommendations outlined in the report, which is available from the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20418.

Extensive questioning from the many Senators present highlighted key concerns of the scientific and academic communities, among them: the lack of a strong presidential science advisor with influence over the administration's budget recommendations and priorities; the need for a shift from military to civilian research support; and the urgency of improving elementary and secondary, as well as undergraduate, science education.<<

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