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[NIJ Conference Hears from Holder, Sampson, Bobo](#)

Fresh from his trip to Stockholm to receive, with Rob Sampson, the International Prize in Criminology from Queen Silvia of Sweden, National Institute of Justice (NIJ) director John Laub presided over his first NIJ Conference held in Arlington, VA on June 20-22.

The annual conference this year focused on what Laub called, Translational Criminology, how to shape policy and practice with research. He also announced that the NIJ response to the National Academies' report *Strengthening the National Institute of Justice* (see [Update, July 12, 2010](#)) was now available at <http://nij.gov>. In the response, Laub indicated that he strongly endorsed the five principles enunciated in the report: ensuring independence and strong governance; strengthening the science mission; improving research infrastructure; maintaining scientific integrity and transparency; and creating a culture of self-assessment.

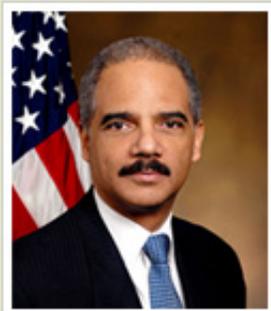
To accomplish these goals, Laub announced that NIJ will pursue a number of strategies. Under discussion is possible legislation to provide the NIJ director with a fixed term similar to some other research agency leaders and to codify a number of the current practices that allow NIJ some independence from the oversight of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

Laub also indicated that to strengthen the science, "NIJ is developing a multi-year strategic plan that clearly establishes research priorities and articulates a path - including the clearest possible commitment of resources, considering current budget realities - for developing an evidence-based body of knowledge that builds a more effective, efficient and fair criminal justice system." This will also include a strong commitment to a transparent peer review system that would involve the establishment of standing panels.

Another facet of the response is the creation of partnerships with other offices within OJP and with other research agencies. Laub declared that this is already occurring with the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Bureau of Justice Statistics as well as possible joint activities with the National Science Foundation and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. In addition, to provide opportunities for input to NIJ from senior criminal-justice practitioners and policymakers, Laub announced that NIJ has re-established a Visiting Fellows program, whose first recipient is former Redlands Police Chief Jim Bueermann.

Holder Reiterates His Support for Evidence-Based Criminal Justice Policy

Speaking at lunch on the meeting's third day, Attorney General Eric Holder once again pronounced his commitment to science. "In fulfilling our most important responsibility - protecting the American people - we are committed to identifying and implementing evidence-based solutions; an approach that allows us to be both tough and...smart on crime," Holder proclaimed. He further declared that the Justice Department is part of the current "golden age of research."



Taking note of the current budget difficulties in the states and localities that have led in some places to reductions in public safety funding and personnel, Holder declared: "We must do everything possible to help our law enforcement partners accomplish more with less, to help policymakers understand what we're up against, and to help practitioners apply the best and latest information that we can provide."

He praised the NIJ's Evidence Integration Initiative for "promoting a stronger connection between research and practice in areas ranging from juvenile justice, to smart policing, to inmate reentry." In addition, the Attorney General indicated that: "Through their outreach, their engagement with a variety of partners, and their commitment to independence and scientific rigor, [NIJ is] paving the way to large-scale reform and improvement. And [it is] ensuring that today's breakthrough findings will not only be shared across disciplines and jurisdictions, but utilized."

"Like everyone here, I, too, am determined to make certain that today's research is valuable - in a

practical sense - to policymakers, public safety officers, and practitioners," Holder proclaimed. He cited NIJ's work regarding sexual assault evidence, including a landmark survey of more than two thousand law enforcement agencies that "revealed that some law enforcement personnel didn't understand the potential value of this type of evidence in the first place."

As another example, Holder remarked on OJP's efforts in "our fight against childhood exposure to violence." OJP, he noted, aside from "providing unsurpassed expertise," is funding eight demonstration sites, which NIJ will help to evaluate, and is also working to develop community-based plans to combat this malady.

Warning against complacency, the Attorney General concluded: "...we must engage more researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and other community stakeholders in these efforts. We also must renew our commitment to supporting - and not settling for anything less than - the very best possible research and analysis."

The Chicago Neighborhoods Project Revisited



The conference also heard from the other Stockholm Prize winner, Professor Robert Sampson of Harvard University. Sampson has been one of the key investigators on the NIJ and MacArthur Foundation-funded Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/PHDCN>). In the fall, the Chicago University Press will publish Sampson's book on his 15 years of research with the project, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*.

In reviewing this multi-method, longitudinal study of neighborhood effects on crime in Chicago, Sampson noted that despite the overall reduction in crime over the past 15 years, in certain places in Chicago there was relative stability in the crime rate. He noted that neighborhoods with collective efficacy had a 50 percent difference in homicide rates than those that did not have this combination of a working trust and a shared willingness of residents to intervene in social control. Sampson also suggested that the relationship goes both ways, since increased crime in a neighborhood can also impact the sense of collective efficacy.

Among other variables that affect this phenomenon, Sampson mentioned cultural processes such as altruism, legal cynicism, and general well-being. He indicated that immigration, at least among the first generation, led to greater neighborhood cohesion and less crime, even in the highest poverty areas. He also suggested that the cohesion of leadership networks and the density of non-profit organizations in an area are other positive factors contributing to collective efficacy in a neighborhood.

Sampson also noted that replications of the Chicago findings have occurred or are occurring in Stockholm, Boston, and Brisbane, Australia. One of the commentators on Sampson's presentation was Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis. Although he made an allusion to Whitey Bulger (this was a few days before the capture), Davis focused on his efforts in Boston to improve collective efficacy in troubled neighborhoods. He indicated that developing trust between police and difficult neighborhoods was a major priority for his department. He agreed with Sampson that the first generation of immigrants demonstrate significant neighborhood cohesion, but some in the subsequent generation, at least in his Boston experience, have become involved in gang activities. Davis concluded by praising the research and asked for continued help on determining "what should cops do?" and "understanding exactly why crime occurs."

Race, Crime and Justice

Speaking at lunch on the first day of the conference, Harvard Sociology Professor Lawrence Bobo

discussed the issue of race, crime and justice. Suggesting that the notion of a post-racial era in America was overblown, Bobo proceeded to recite the dismal data on what he called the "racialized mass incarceration" strategy that has infected our criminal justice system.

Citing Randall Kennedy, Bobo suggested that the strategy was not deliberate or overt, but the product of key economic, cultural, and political factors. These included the "war on drugs," as well as concentrations of poverty, and limited economic opportunities for those with little education (see other story on Black Boys).

The results of this mass incarceration problem are many, Bobo indicated. Confidence in the criminal justice system in many neighborhoods becomes diminished and the legal cynicism, noted by Sampson above, has led to jury nullification situations. The strain on state budgets caused by prison expenditures has crowded out spending on higher education, Bobo argued. He also indicated that because felons and released felons in most states are denied voting rights, electoral outcomes are distorted. He also suggested some former "lock-em-up" folks like University of Pennsylvania Political Scientist John Dilulio Jr., are now arguing that "two million prisoners are enough."

OJP Announces CrimeSolutions.Gov Database

Laurie Robinson, Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), announced at the NIJ Conference that her efforts to produce a one-stop website that would provide practitioners and policy makers with information about "what works" in criminal justice have come to fruition.

As part of her Evidence Integration Initiative (E2I), Crimesolutions.Gov (www.crimesolutions.gov) has reviews that provide information on more than 150 justice-related programs and assigns "evidence ratings" -- effective, promising, or no effects -- to indicate whether there is support from research that a program achieves its goals.

Robinson explained that "CrimeSolutions.gov helps us take a 'smart on crime' approach that relies on data-driven, evidence-based analysis to identify and replicate justice-related programs that have shown real results in preventing and reducing crime and serving crime victims."

According to OJP, CrimeSolutions.gov is a searchable online database of evidence-based programs covering a range of justice-related topics, including corrections; courts; crime prevention; substance abuse; juveniles; law enforcement; technology and forensics; and victims. The site is a tool to understand, access and integrate scientific evidence about programs into programmatic and policy decisions.

The reviewers for the database analyze the most rigorous evaluation research available to assess the quality, strength, and extent of the evidence that indicates the program achieves its goals. The studies selected for review comprise the program's evidence base. The reviewers use a standard scoring instrument for each study reviewed and assign scores across four dimensions: Program's Conceptual Framework; Study Design Quality; Study Outcomes; and Program Fidelity. The reviewers are subject-matter and research methodology experts who assess the research evidence to determine whether a program achieves its goals. A list is available on the website.

OJP Scientific Advisory Board Holds Second Meeting

In the midst of the NIJ Conference, the Office of Justice Program's (OJP) Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) held its second meeting. Al Blumstein, Professor of Urban Systems and Operations Research at Carnegie Mellon University, the proclaimed "King of Criminology," and COSSA's former President, chairs the SAB. (For a full list of the SAB's members see [Update, November 22, 2010.](#))

Since its first meeting in January 2011 (see [Update, February 7, 2011](#)) the SAB has organized itself

into Subcommittees that have held a series of conference calls and meetings with OJP officials. Most of the current meeting consisted of reports from these groups and continuing discussion on the structure and operation of the Board.

The Subcommittee focusing on the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is co-chaired by Joan Petersilia of the Stanford Law School, and David Weisburd of George Mason University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a former COSSA Board Member. To provide insight into the non-social science components of the NIJ, three people experts in forensic science and technology were added to the group: Tom Mitchell, Professor of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon, George Whitesides, Professor of Chemistry at Harvard, and Eric Huel, Director of the Vermont Forensic Laboratory and a Professor of Biology at the University of Vermont.

Petersilia reported that the Subcommittee communicated with NIJ Director John Laub and learned about focus groups that NIJ had convened on community crime prevention and gangs as part of a topic priority-setting exercise. The group also expects to review the revisions to the peer review process, including the proposed standing peer review panel. They would also like to undertake an examination of the long-term funding needs for the Institute.

Colin Lofton of Albany University, SUNY, co-chair of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Subcommittee, reported on its activities. He noted that the group had discussed with BJS Director James Lynch how they could assist in the restoration of the National Crime Victimization Study, particularly with regard to the extension of its usefulness by providing small-area and sub-national estimates. The Subcommittee also expressed interest in discussing with Lynch the expanded use of administrative data. Lofton also noted that his group was concerned with how to limit the damages of possible upcoming budget cuts. The Senate bill to remove the BJS director from Senate confirmation, currently under Senate floor consideration, also arose in the discussion (see [Update, May 2, 2011](#)). The group also articulated continued unease about BJS's continued scientific independence and integrity and Weisburd expressed his belief that fixed terms and the appointment process for both the NIJ and BJS directors should be part of the SAB agenda.

Other SAB Subcommittees are examining: the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, for which the group proclaimed its interest in how the Office determines priorities for its limited discretionary research and evaluation activities; Evidence Translation and Integration, which expressed delight in the development of CrimeSolutions.gov (see other story); and Quality and Protection of Science, which is also exploring the proposed peer review revisions, the leadership and staffing of a science-related agency, and how to maintain policies and a culture to support the integrity of science.

The full SAB will meet again in January 2012. In the meantime, discussion of its role and structure will continue.

Appropriations Subcommittee Chair 'Troubled' by Process to Stand up of NCATS

In a June 15 [letter](#) to the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT), chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, "suggest[s] NIH cease all action related to establishing" the proposed National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) "until the President submits a formal request and congressional action is completed...If the President decides to submit a formal budget amendment and provides answers to my questions to allow us to review the proposal fully, we will be happy to consider the request."

Rehberg states that he is "very troubled by reports that [the National Institutes of Health (NIH)] has already taken steps to start the search for a new director of NCATS in advance of congressional action." He cites the public discussion of NCATS at the June 9th meeting of the Advisory Council to the Director of the NIH and the announcement that the "agency has begun the search process for a

director and the process to notify current employees of reassignment to be effective on October 1, 2011 in anticipation of NCATS standing up on that date." Moves Rehberg finds "premature."

The Chairman also notes his concerns regarding how the creation of NCATS will impact programs such as the Institutional Development Awards (IDeA) and the Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSAs). Citing the need to "ensure federal programs do not prevent or hinder the private sector from advancing the transformation of medical research into clinical applications and economic growth," Rehberg claims that based on "the scant level of information provided to the Appropriations Committee" to date, it is unclear how NCATS "is the answer to advance translational research."

National Prevention Strategy Released

On June 16, the Obama Administration released its National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy. This Strategy is a "comprehensive plan designed to increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life." It recognizes "that good health comes not just from receiving quality medical care but from stopping disease before it starts...Prevention should be woven into all aspects of our lives, including where and how we live, learn, work and play.

The Strategy, called for by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), outlines four strategic directions: 1) Building Healthy and Safe Community Environments, 2) Expanding Quality Preventive Services in Both Clinical and Community Settings, 3) Empowering People to Make Healthy Choices, and 4) Eliminating Health Disparities. It also includes seven priorities: tobacco free living, preventing drug abuse and excessive alcohol use, healthy eating, active living, injury and violence free living, reproductive and sexual health, mental and emotional well-being.

U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin serves as the Chair of the National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council (a.k.a. National Prevention Council) which is comprised of 17 heads of departments, agencies, and offices across the Federal government. The Surgeon General notes in her message included in the Strategy that it "will move us from a system of sick care to one based on wellness and prevention."

The Strategy emphasizes that "many of the strongest predictors of health and well-being fall outside of the health care setting. Social, economic, and environmental factors all influence health." It also stresses that "preventing disease requires more than providing people with information to make healthy choices."

The Strategy provides evidence-based recommendations, including policy, program and system approaches, for each strategic direction and priority. It also recognizes the need for future research and evaluation and addressing unmet prevention and wellness needs. The Strategy notes that "[d]ata and research can be used to strengthen implementation of the National Prevention Strategy."

According to the Strategy, five major scientific resources were used to validate the evidence for each recommendation: The Guide to Community Preventive Services, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), Healthy People 2020, the Institute of Medicine, and the Cochrane Reviews.

More information on the National Prevention Strategy and the National Prevention Council is available at www.HealthCare.gov/center/councils/nphpphc.

GAO Releases Report on HHS CER Awards

On June 14, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released its Congressionally-mandated report on comparative effectiveness research (CER). The report, *HHS Research Awards:*

Use of Recovery Act and Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act Funds for Comparative Effectiveness Research (GAO-11-712R), includes information on the expenditures (grants, cooperative agreements and contracts) HHS has made using the \$1.1 billion to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) specifically for CER, including \$400 million to the Secretary of HHS, \$300 million to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and \$400 million to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

In addition, AHRQ was directed via the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) to disseminate the findings of CER published by the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) and other government-funded research in consultation with NIH. PPACA established a trust fund to support PCORI's mission. A specified percentage is designated for the Secretary of HHS and AHRQ in FY 2011-FY 2019 for dissemination of CER findings, among other things. According to the GAO, none of these funds had been obligated or expended as of April 2011. AHRQ, however, informed the GAO that it has developed a draft spending plan for the funds, which is currently under review by HHS.

A copy of the report is available at www.gao.gov.

Greenberg Named Acting Director of NIGMS



Judith Greenberg will become acting director of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) in July. She replaces outgoing director Jeremy Berg. National Institutes of Health (NIH) director Francis Collins made the announcement on June 13.

Collins noted Greenberg's "long history of exceptional leadership at NIGMS and NIH levels." Greenberg previously served in this capacity from May 2002 to November 2003. She is a biologist by training and has directed the Institutes' Division of Genetics and Developmental Biology since 1988. She also oversaw the development of the NIGM's strategic plan issued in 2008 and its strategic plan for research training issued earlier this year ([see Update, May 2, 2011](#)). She is currently chairing the implementation committee for the training strategic plan. She has served as the principal leader of the NIH Director's Pioneer Award program since 2004 and of the NIH Director's New Innovator Award since its inception in 2007.

Greenberg earned a B.S. in biology from the University of Pittsburgh, an M.A. in biology from Boston University and a Ph.D. in developmental biology from Bryn Mawr College

Census Bureau Requests OMB to Continue ACS

Under the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act, the U.S. Census Bureau must request authorization from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to continue to conduct the American Community Survey (ACS). The Bureau has published the request in the *Federal Register* (June 23, 2011, p.36898). OMB is also seeking comments from the public on the request.

Over the years, the ACS has encountered opposition from some in Congress for increasing the response burden on the American public and for asking questions that some consider "none of the government's business." The latest request could revive that opposition. Although OMB is highly unlikely to cancel the survey, support for the survey needs expression.

In submitting its request, the Census Bureau details information that outlines the purposes, scope,

methodology, and the data it provides. It also notes the decision to use FY 2011 funds to increase the size of the ACS sample, something the Bureau has sought from Congress for a number of years.

The Bureau notes that it has developed a methodology to collect and update every year demographic, social, economic, and housing data that are essentially the same as the "long-form" data that the Census Bureau traditionally has collected once a decade as part of the decennial census. This is the ACS.

It explains that Federal and state government agencies use such data to evaluate and manage federal programs and to distribute funding for various programs that include food stamp benefits, transportation dollars, and housing grants. State, county, and community governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and the general public use information like housing quality, income distribution, journey-to-work patterns, immigration data, and regional age distributions for decision-making and program evaluation.

The ACS, the Bureau indicates, is now the only source of data available for small area levels across the Nation and in Puerto Rico. In addition, there is an increased interest in obtaining data for small subpopulations such as groups within the Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian populations, the elderly, and children. The ACS provides current data throughout the decade for these small areas and subpopulations.

The ACS began providing up-to-date profiles in 2006 for areas and population groups of 65,000 or more people, providing policymakers, planners, and service providers in the public and private sectors with information every year-not just every ten years. The ACS program will provide estimates annually for all states and for all medium and large cities, counties, and metropolitan areas. For smaller areas and population groups, it took three to five years to accumulate information to provide accurate estimates. The first three-year estimates were released in 2008; the first five-year estimates in 2010. The Bureau expects to update these multiyear estimates annually.

Using the Master Address File (MAF) from the decennial census that is updated each year, the Bureau will select a sample of addresses, mail survey forms each month to a new group of potential households, and attempt to conduct interviews over the telephone with households that have not responded. Upon completion of the telephone follow-up, they will select a sub-sample of the remaining households, which have not responded, typically at a rate of one in three, to designate a household for a personal interview. The Bureau will also conduct interviews with a sample of residents at a sample of group quarters (GQ) facilities. Collecting these data from a new sample of housing units (HU) and GQ facilities every month provided more timely data and reduced respondent burden in the 2010 Census.

Regarding data releases, a yearly microdata file, similar to the Public Use Microdata Sample file of the Census 2000 long-form records, as well as total population summary tabulations similar to the Census 2000 tabulations down to the block group level, are part of the plan. These files and their associated documentation are available through the Internet.

In January 2005, the Census Bureau began full implementation of the ACS in households with a sample of approximately 250,000 addresses per month in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, approximately 3,000 residential addresses per month in Puerto Rico are selected as part of the Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS). In January 2006, the Census Bureau implemented ACS data collection for the entire national population by including a sample of 20,000 GQ facilities and a sample of 200,000 residents living in GQ facilities in the 50 states and the District of Columbia along with the annual household sample. Starting with the June 2011 mail panel, the Census Bureau increased the annual sample size for the ACS to 3.54 million households (or 295,000 households per month) in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Finally, the Bureau will also continue to examine the operational issues, research the data quality, collect cost information and make recommendations in the future for this annual data collection.

Data users can use information from this survey to help evaluate the ACS program and to give feedback to the Census Bureau to help in their evaluations.

Written comments and recommendations for the proposed information collection should be sent by July 23, 2011 to Brian Harris-Kojetin, OMB Desk Officer either by fax (202-395- 7245) or e-mail (bharrisk@omb.eop.gov).

House Passes FY 2012 Agriculture and Rural Development Appropriations Bill: Major Cuts to ERS and NASS Thwarted

On June 14 H.R. 2112, the FY 2012 Agriculture and Rural Development Appropriations bill, came to the House floor. The measure, as it left the Appropriations Committee, provided \$17.3 billion in discretionary spending authority for the Agriculture Department and related agencies, a cut of roughly \$2.6 billion from current funding and \$5 billion from the President's request.

Democrats, angry about proposed cuts to nutrition programs for women and their children, stalled debate of amendments for four hours on the 14th. Nonetheless, an amendment that would strip funds from agricultural research, offered by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), was briefly considered. The amendment sought to reduce funding for the Economic Research Service (ERS) by \$43 million or 50 percent; reduce funding for the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) by \$85 million, over 50 percent; reduce funding for salaries and expenses of the Agricultural Research Service by \$650 million; reduce funding for Food For Peace Title II Grants by \$1.04 billion and to apply \$1.818 billion to the savings reduction account. Chaffetz explained that eliminating duplication was his goal, saying that that he hoped his cuts would drive down the costs of these programs with " the hope and desire...that they will somehow unify to do and accomplish what these duplicative services are." The Chair then took a voice vote, and announced that the ayes had prevailed. Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA), Chairman of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, asked for a recorded vote, pushing a final verdict on the amendment off until the next day.

On Wednesday, H.R. 2112 was again on the House floor. Late the night before Rep. Broun (R-GA) had offered another amendment that proposed to reduce funding for the ERS by \$7 million. The afternoon was tense with a fast series of votes on the numerous amendments that had been offered to the already controversial bill. The Chaffetz amendment came up before its Broun counterpart and failed 83-338. Later, the House considered the Broun amendment. Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA), Ranking Democrat on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, rose in opposition to Broun, stating that "this is really a cut that does a lot more harm than the gentleman who's introducing it intends to do, and I think if he really understood what the full scope of the Economic Research Service was he wouldn't ask that [we] take 10 percent out of that Department just merely to reduce the amount of money that we're spending." The Broun amendment also failed, by a vote of 125-298. COSSA, with help from the American Statistical Association, the Council on Food and Agricultural Resource Economics, and other groups, advocated for the defeat of the Chaffetz and Broun amendments.

Even with both amendments defeated, however, funding for agricultural research did not make it off of the House floor untouched; Rep. Kingston successfully introduced an amendment to reduce all other funds in the bill 0.78 percent in order to restore funding to the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. This extra funding amounts to \$147 million, an offset to increase WIC to just over \$6 billion. The program was originally slated to get \$5.9 billion, an 11 percent reduction from current funding and 18 percent below President Obama's fiscal 2012 request. Further, an amendment from Rep. Gardner (R-CO) to increase funds for "Integrated Activities" and to reduce funds for "National Institute of Food and Agriculture-research and education activities" by \$4.4 million respectively was passed by voice vote. This money will be a direct transfer from the NIFA competitive grants funds.

Also successfully removed from the bill was a provision barring funds to the Food and Drug Administration for rule-making activities unless they are based on "hard science." (See [Update, June 13, 2011.](#)) This amendment, offered by Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT) was subject to a point of order since it was considered legislating on an appropriations bill.

Ultimately, the bill passed on June 16 and was sent to the Senate.

VA Research Appropriations Matches President's Request for Reductions

Also on June 14, the House passed H.R. 2055, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (VA) Appropriations bill by a strong bipartisan vote of 411-5.

Included in the bill is a \$72.2 million cut for VA research from the 2011 enacted level of \$581 million. This number, while lower than the amount provided in the previous year, matches the President's request. The VA will support around 2,100 research projects during FY 2012 with these funds.

The Committee Report accompanying the legislation requested that the VA to conduct a study to assess the extent of problem gambling among Veterans Health Administration (VHA) patients, and subsequently develop assessment and treatment approaches for these folks.

The Committee also specifically recommended that the VA proceed as quickly as possible in reinstating the Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study in order to more effectively secure representative sample populations. The Committee called for a report by January 1, 2012 detailing the progress made with identification of sample populations; development of study protocol and research questions; and time frames for completion of the research, data analysis, and publication of results. Finally, the Committee urged VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to conduct epidemiological studies of existing VA medical data to determine if there are anomalies and differences that become apparent based on location of different duty stations or periods of service.

Due to its popularity amongst legislators, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs' bill is likely to be the first appropriations area addressed by the Senate.

NCHS Publishes Health Interview Survey Early Estimates

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has just published its *Early Release of Selected Estimates Based on Data from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey* (NHIS). In this release, the NCHS updates estimates for 15 selected health measures and presents estimates from 1997 through 2009 for comparison. NCHS is publishing the 15 Early Release measures prior to final data editing and final weighting, to provide access to the most recent information from the NHIS. The agency will update the estimates as each new quarter of NHIS data becomes available.

Health insurance coverage leads the 15 topics. The early report reveals that while the level of people of all ages without health insurance coverage interviewed in 2010 is on par with results dating back to 1993, it is the highest out of all these years at 16 percent. This is higher, but not significantly different from the 15.4 percent estimate in 2009. Interestingly, the number of those persons 18 and under without health insurance is actually the lowest it has been since 1993 at 5.8 million, while the uninsured population in all other age groups has grown.

The report also covers the growing epidemic of obesity. In 2010, 28.4 percent of U.S. adults aged 20 and over were obese, which was not significantly different from the 2009 estimate of 28 percent but consistent with the constant rise of this problem. The prevalence of obesity among U.S. adults aged 20 and over has increased over time, from 19.4 percent in 1997 to 28.4

percent in 2010. In no age group does gender appear to make a significant difference on this measure.

The other measures included in this report are: lacking a usual place to go for medical care, obtaining needed medical care, receiving an influenza vaccination and a pneumococcal vaccination, leisure-time physical activity, current smoking, alcohol consumption, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) testing, general health status, personal care needs, serious psychological distress, diagnosed diabetes, and asthma episodes and current asthma.

For further information, including a complete copy of the release, please click [here](#).

ETS and CDF Examine Educational Prospects for Black Boys

On June 14, Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) sponsored the symposium, *A Strong Start: Positioning Young Black Boys for Educational Success*, which focused on the crisis facing the 3.5 million Black boys under the age of 9 years in the U.S.

ETS is a nonprofit organization that conducts research and develops, administers and scores more than 50 million tests annually. CDF is a non-profit advocacy and research organization focused on the needs of our nation's most vulnerable children.

The symposium made clear that Black children face an array of challenges from poverty, to the achievement gap which presents itself as early as 9 months, to broken families and communities.

"The toxic cocktail of poverty, illiteracy, racial disparities, violence, massive incarceration and family breakdown is sentencing millions of children to dead end and hopeless lives and threatens to undermine the past half century of racial and social progress," said Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund.

Early childhood researchers at the symposium spoke of the small window of opportunity in a child's early years to affect brain development. Young children who are emotionally, socially, and economically secure have a solid foundation to support emerging cognitive skills. However, those children who are surrounded by anxiety, stress, or fear, lack a sufficient foundation on which their cognitive skills can be built. Many young Black males living in poverty must face these numerous challenges and more as they develop, grow and learn. These challenges can undermine the critical development that is needed to support cognitive skills development, academic achievement and ultimately future success in life.

Of the 36 percent of Black children born in poverty more than two thirds will continue to be poor for at least half of their childhoods. The poverty rate for Black kids is three times as high as for white kids. The unemployment rate for Black households is twice that of White households with 38 percent of Black children living in a household where neither parent has full-time year round employment compared to 19 percent of whites. These children living in poverty will face inadequate healthcare, financial instability, community violence and other forms of stress associated with poverty.

Black children are also subject to stresses from within the family structure. Nearly 75 percent of Black children are born to single mothers compared to nearly 40 percent of white kids. They are also more than twice as likely to be born to a teen mother; the rates are 63.7 per 1,000 Black girls ages 15 to 19, compared to 26.6 per 1,000 White girls of the same age. Due to the high rate of teen mothers, Black children are born to mothers with less education and thus fewer opportunities. Thirteen percent of Black children have a mother with less than a high school education, compared to only five percent of White children. Only 17 percent of Black children have a mother with at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 36 percent of White children.

Edelman told those gathered at the symposium that the greatest security threat the U.S. faces is our

failure to adequately educate our kids. Calling the achievement gap a national disaster that is the "moral and economic Achilles heel of our nation." The 2009 NAEP reveals that only 12 percent of fourth grade Black males performed at or above proficient levels in reading, compared with 38 percent of White males. In math, 14 percent of Blacks are proficient compared to 53 percent of whites. At grade eight only eight percent of Black males attending large city schools are proficient in reading, for White students nationally 33 percent are proficient. In math 10 percent of Blacks are proficient compared to 44 percent of whites.

Russlynn Ali, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, said that low expectations and low standards play a part in the achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts. These low expectations play out in both education policy and in practice by teachers and school administrators. Ali said that we need to realize that what schools and teachers do and say matters and has a profound effect on how children view school and their education. She called for a rethinking of the way we educate poor kids and kids of color. Ali called for smarter more targeted research saying "we need to collect the right data and do things more smartly. For too long we've relied on anecdotes rather than data."

The panelists admitted that while Washington policies can make a difference in the lives of children, change can't come from Washington alone-it must also come from communities, families, and schools.

"We need to improve the conditions in which children are nurtured, grow up, attend school, and live to provide a stronger start for educational success," says Michael T. Nettles, Senior Vice President of ETS's Policy Evaluation and Research Center.

Farm Foundation Event Examines Rural Development in Tough Economic Times

On June 14 the Farm Foundation held a forum, *Rural Development in a Time of Fiscal Constraint*. Speakers included: Lionel 'Bo' Beaulieu of the Southern Regional Development Center, representing the Regional Rural Development Centers (RRDCs); Donald Larson, Brookings County, S.D., representing the National Association of Counties; Chuck Hassebrook, Center for Rural Affairs; Matthew Chase of the National Association of Development Organizations; and Eddie Browning of the Arizona Rural Development Council.

Chase began his talk by noting that maintaining the status quo in rural areas is not an option-less developed areas would continue to fall behind. Beaulieu further emphasized the necessity of development by pointing out that most poor counties in the nation are in the rural south. And yet, while everyone present was in agreement about the need to focus on developing rural areas, the panelists revealed some stark numbers including that in the past decade rural development funding has fallen 30 percent and that the Agriculture Appropriations bill recently passed by the House (see other story) zeroed out funding for the RRDCs.

RRDCs are designed to link the research and educational outreach capacity of the nation's public universities with communities, local decision makers, entrepreneurs, families, and farmers and ranchers, to help address a wide range of development issues. Each of the four centers collaborate on national issues that span regions-like e-commerce, the changing interface between rural, suburban, and urban places, and workforce quality and jobs creation. Each tailors programs to address particular needs in its region. Established by the Rural Development Act of 1972, RRDCs have suffered from steadily declining funding in recent years. From a peak of around \$1.3 million in funding, the centers were allotted only \$998,000 in FY 2011, leaving only about \$237,000 for each Center. While funding has been growing slimmer, however, the Centers have not grown less effective. Last year RRDCs leveraged three additional dollars for every one dollar of Federal funding. This effectiveness does not negate the need for Federal funding, however, since grant funds are typically limited in how they can be used. Amongst other accomplishments, RRDCs have done some highly effective work in [economic development](#) which, as the panel pointed out, is

sorely needed in many of America's rural areas.

Repeatedly emphasized at the forum was the indispensability of entrepreneurs in rural areas. According to Beaulieu, one in five people in the rural workforce is self-employed. The panel emphasized the need to give these people support, both financially and conceptually. They noted that banks need encouragement to lend to rural America, where people are frequently forced to take out loans with poor rates. Many in these areas take out rural Housing and Urban Development (HUD) loans and don't get easy access to flexible grants. Flexibility is vital, Larson noted, since solutions must fit individual isolated communities. In addition, the RRDCs have been working on youth entrepreneurship in order to give young people a sense of stake in their community and create an inviting atmosphere for them to settle in as adults.

Another frequently addressed point was the need for broadband in rural areas. While the gap is not as big as it once was, it remains highly detrimental to rural communities that do not enjoy the same access to the economic, educational, health care and public safety opportunities and services that broadband delivers in urbanized communities. Of Americans living in rural areas, 28 percent do not enjoy access to the kind of broadband most Americans have come to expect as standard. The USDA also released a report on June 22 on the topic, "[Bringing Broadband to Rural America: Update to Report on a Rural Broadband Strategy.](#)"

While the Forum discussed many other topics, the overall message of the forum was clear: there is a huge amount of work left to be done with rural development and any attempt to derail funding for effective programs would be highly detrimental to any progress. For more information on the Farm Foundation, please look [here](#).

AAAS Explores Budget Situation for Research and Development

On June 20, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Science & Technology Policy Fellowships held the Federal Innovation & Research Evaluation (FIRE) Affinity Group Symposium. A series of panels throughout the day focused on the current budgetary situation. Many federal research and development (R&D) funding agencies experienced unparalleled one-time budget infusions from the 2009 American Reinvestment & Recovery Act (ARRA). Only two years later Federal agencies are now making tough decisions about program funding in the face of budget cuts. The choices made will have long-term ramifications for research, innovation, the economy, and the future of U.S. competitiveness.

The first panel addressed data transparency and new tools of innovation. On the panel were Stefano Bertuzzi, Health Science Policy Analyst, Office of Science Policy, Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health (NIH); Aman Bhandari, Senior Advisor for Innovation, Department of Health and Human Services; Denise Duncan, Senior Fellow, LMI Government Consulting; and Cameron Neylon, Senior Scientist, Science and Technologies Facilities Council (UK). While the panelists each discussed very different points, a uniform message became clear: data must be thorough, well-documented and clearly connected to related concepts. Only in this way can scientists clearly illustrate the true value of research, not only to legislators making decisions about what to fund, but to the general public.

The second panel focused on evaluating ARRA and its impacts. On the panel were David Croson, Program Director in the Science of Science & Innovation Policy, National Science Foundation (NSF); Richard Freeman, Herbert Ascherman Chair in Economics, Harvard University/National Bureau of Economic Research; Luci Roberts, Director, Division of Planning and Evaluation, Office of Extramural Research, NIH; and Bill Valdez, Acting Director, Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, Department of Energy. Croson discussed rapid grants and noted that looking at patent data shows the distinct impact of ARRA. Freeman noted that ARRA led to funding of more studies than normal. Although some will not be productive, he suggested, the potential gains in knowledge make the investment worthwhile. Roberts began by emphasizing how wise she believed it was that

R&D was included in ARRA. Since ARRA was meant to stimulate the economy, NIH used the funds to look for measurable short-term benefits to the American public. As the last of the funds dwindle away, the information on progress is still very unstructured, she said. NIH took from the experience that more extensive planning would have been useful so that it could more efficiently and rapidly analyze the data. Valdez spent much of his time discussing the impacts of STAR Metrics, which most panelists agreed are very useful. The resounding conclusion to the panel, stated in answer to a question from the audience, was that answers about the long-term impacts of ARRA would not be available for quite some time.

The final panel discussed prioritizing funding for specific programs, identifying programs for elimination and the dilemmas this creates for agencies. Taking part in the discussion were Sharon Drumm, Staff Officer, Agricultural Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); Christopher King; Staff Director, Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology; Jitinder Kohli, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress; and Eric Toone, Deputy Director for Technology, Department of Energy, Advanced Research Projects Agency.

King attempted to give the room some understanding of how appropriations decisions are made on the Hill, emphasizing that mentalities surrounding programs changed very rapidly now in the wake of an election that shook the balance of Congress. He used the example of the Advanced Research Projects Agency on Energy (ARPA-E) to illustrate the pace at which vital new projects can go. In 2003, early calls for such a project were heard from stakeholders and in 2005, after the release of the *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* report, key leaders called for the establishment of ARPA-E. While the project was technically created under Bush, it was not funded until April of 2009 when it began its work. Toone went on to discuss the work of ARPA-E emphasizing that it works with performers to create qualitative, aggressive, and accountable milestones. He noted that the agency terminates projects that are not working.

King also discussed the atmosphere surrounding research on the Hill, noting that while basic research has always been sacred, H.R. 1 showed that this is no longer true. While many agencies and programs might fear prioritizing, since it could be used as an outline of what to cut, King advised the audience that groups would do better to participate in helping determine the cuts that would happen regardless of their input. He also noted that performance metrics are vital, but that performance evaluations (internal review) simply aren't as important to people on the Hill.

National Academies' Report on Successful K-12 STEM Education Released

When the National Science Foundation (NSF) appeared before the House Commerce, Science, Justice Appropriations Subcommittee in March 2011, Chairman Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) admonished director Subra Suresh for the Foundation's failure to deliver a report requested two years ago on examples of successful Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education programs (see [Update, April 18, 2011](#)).

On June 23, the National Academies' Board on Science Education (BOSE) released a report to remedy Chairman Wolf's concerns. Prepared by a panel chaired by Professor Adam Gamoran, Department of Sociology and Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison, the report, *Successful K-12 STEM Education: Identifying Effective Approaches in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*, fulfills the panel's charge of "outlining criteria for identifying effective STEM schools and programs and identifying which of those criteria could be addressed with available data and research, and those where further work is needed to develop appropriate data sources." To help produce the report BOSE held a two-day workshop on May 10-11 to explore the subject (see [Update, May 18, 2011](#)).

The committee also solicited background papers prepared for the workshop, examined the limited body of existing and forthcoming research on STEM-focused schools, the broader base of research

related to effective STEM education practices, and research on effective schooling generally. The goal of the report, according to the BOSE panel is "to provide information that leaders at the school district, state, and national level can use to make strategic decisions about improving STEM education."

In exploring criteria for STEM success, the committee shuns the reliance on student test scores and cites the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, VA as a successful STEM school "whose mission is to provide students a challenging learning environment focused on math, science, and technology, to inspire joy at the prospect of discovery, and to foster a culture of innovation based on ethical behavior and the shared interests of humanity." Although the report admits it is difficult to measure interest and motivation, creativity, or commitment to ethical behavior, "it is essential to do so given the importance of preparing students to be leaders in STEM education - and not just good test takers."

The report highlights and profiles examples of schools that have the potential to "meet the overarching goals for U.S. STEM education." These are put in three categories: selective STEM schools that have admission criteria; inclusive STEM schools; and schools with STEM-focused technical and career education. The Committee concluded that a limited research base made it difficult to determine what made these schools effective and what separated them from non-STEM-focused schools.

The panel called for future research on STEM-focused schools that: 1) disentangles school effects from the characteristics of the students who attend them; 2) identifies and describes distinctive aspects of their educational practices; and 3) measures the schools' long-term effectiveness relative to the broad goals of U.S. STEM education.

The report is available for downloading at:

https://download.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13158.

Evidence Based Policy Symposium To Occur at George Mason

The Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University is joining forces this year with the Campbell Collaboration to host a Joint Symposium on Evidence-Based Policy. Held at George Mason University on August 15 - 16, 2011, this symposium will bring together leaders, scholars, and practitioners in the fields of crime and justice, education, social welfare, international development, and evaluation methodology for an impressive array of panels, special workshops, and plenaries. Through these events, the Center hope to engage with its communities in an ongoing discussion about the development, use, and improvement of evaluation research for decision making in public policy. Three workshops will be offered on Monday, August 15th, and then the symposium panels, awards luncheon, and plenary session will take place on August 16th.

For more information including registration and an agenda go to:

<http://gemini.gmu.edu/cebcp/CEBCPSymposium.html>.

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