
CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

COSSA WASHINGTON UPDATE

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- COSSA Holds Annual Meeting *JT, HS*
- Foreign Debt Threatens U.S. Economy, According to Nobel Laureates *HS*
- Fromkin Named to COSSA Board of Directors *HS*

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COSSA HOLDS ANNUAL MEETING

The Consortium of Social Science Associations held its annual meeting on November 6, with more than 50 representatives from COSSA members, affiliates, and contributors in attendance. D. Allan Bromley, assistant to the President for science and technology and director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, was expected to present the major address of the conference. He was unable to attend, however, when President Bush dispatched him to represent the United States at the international conference on global warming in the Hague. In his stead, Bromley offered a letter expressing his views on the role of the social and behavioral sciences within the science policy arena. Excerpts from the letter follow:

Bromley Says Social Sciences Should Play Larger Role

"... I was very much looking forward to talking to your group because of my firm belief that the social and behavioral sciences must play a much more prominent role in issues of science and technology policy than they have in the past.

"Many of the outstanding problems we face today--such as the fate of the environment, the danger of nuclear war, the curse of world hunger, and the burgeoning costs of medical care, to name just a few--are often laid at the door of science and technology. Yet in all of these cases, the science and technology needed to solve these problems are effectively in hand. What we do not know are the social, behavioral, and economic consequences of the various possible courses of action available to us. Nor do we have an adequate understanding of the value systems underlying the decisions we face.

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"Medical care technology offers a vivid illustration of this point. Modern medical technologies are continuing to make it possible for people to live longer and healthier lives. Yet because of the burgeoning cost of these technologies, we will soon face the necessity of deciding to withhold life-saving or life-extending techniques for the simple reason that we will no longer, as a society, be able to afford them. Who will make such decisions? What value systems will underlie the decisions that must be made? The British have already decided that if you are over 60, high-technology medicine will effectively be denied you...

"In discussions between my self, OSTP's Associate Director for Policy and International Affairs Tom Ratchford, and OSTP's Associate Director for Life Sciences Jim Wyngaarden, we have devoted considerable attention to ways of integrating the social and behavioral sciences into science and technology policy. We are moving forward on several fronts. First, as soon as budgetary considerations allow, we intend to appoint an Assistant Director for the Social Sciences under the Associate Director for Policy and International Affairs. This individual will work with all four of the office's Associate Director to ensure that the social and behavioral sciences are represented in OSTP's deliberations.

"The social and behavioral sciences will also be represented on the new President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology (PCAST). PCAST will consist of 12 prestigious, broadly based individuals who will examine a broad range of science and technology issues and make policy recommendations to the President, and at the President's request I will serve as the Council's chairman. It is expected that PCAST will establish smaller groups to focus on specific issues, and questions in the social and behavioral sciences are likely to be among the issues that PCAST decides to investigate in depth.

"Finally, we are in the process of revitalizing the Federal Coordinating Council for Science, Engineering, and Technology (FCCSET), which is the entity within OSTP that coordinates the activities of various federal agencies in science and technology. We expect to set up one or more committees within FCCSET that will deal with the broad range of social and behavioral science research now scattered throughout the federal government. We hope that this attention to social science research will bring it a new cohesion and visibility and make explicit its importance in the national agenda. A new activity, just now being established, is the Human Resources Committee (HRC), which will coordinate the activities of all federal agencies in education, generally, and in professional manpower, in particular. Obviously, this will have a large social science component.

"In his 1959 Rede Lecture on the BBC, C. P. Snow suggested that the intellectual and practical life of all of western society is increasingly being split into two cultures, with a gulf of incomprehension, misunderstanding, and occasional hostility between the two sides. Though this distinction captures some

important aspects of modern life, it glosses over several important facts. In particular, it ignores the crucial position of the social and behavioral sciences as a mediator between the two cultures. Social and behavioral scientists have the opportunity to draw upon the best aspects of the physical sciences on one side and the humanities on the other. You can apply the rigor of the physical sciences to social and behavioral questions that have otherwise defied analysis and, at the same time, demonstrate the social and behavioral constraints on the new capabilities produced by the natural sciences.

"The time is long past when we can afford to follow our narrow professional interests in confronting national and international problems. Our future, and the future of our planet, depend on our learning to work together effectively. I look forward to a long and productive partnership with your consortium and with the social and behavioral scientists you represent."

Green Tells Social Scientists to Better Explain Research Benefits

Speaking in place of Bromley was Rep. William Green (R-NY), who called upon social scientists to better explain the importance of their research to national policymaking. The ranking Republican on the VA-HUD-Independent Agencies appropriations subcommittee, Green urged social scientists to offer Congress more detailed explanations of how social and behavioral science research can help legislators formulate policy.

Noting that Congress often equates social science with "soft" science, Green pointed out that research funding is currently being driven by the "competitiveness" issue. And while members of Congress are familiar with some social science research -- polling, for example -- they often fail to appreciate how it relates to solving the nation's problems, Green explained.

Green suggested that the Bromley's appointment as director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the elevation of the science adviser's post to the level of an assistant to the President, may be a good sign. The status upgrade may indicate that the Bush administration is willing to give more prominence to the advice of the scientific community, a significant change from the previous administration, he added.

Green expressed distress that his appropriations subcommittee has been unable to carry out the promise of the last two administrations to double the funding of the National Science Foundation (NSF). There are too many needy competing interests, he explained, and in these days of scarce resources it is difficult to vastly increase the budget of any one agency. He did point out his efforts, as well as those of Sen. Jake Garn (R-UT) and Rep. Robert Traxler (D-MI), to find extra funding for

NSF research in recent conference committee deliberations on the agency's budget.

Green noted his continuing concern with the state of pre-college science education in this country, suggesting that NSF has done a relatively good job in this area. Nevertheless, he continued, the agency could do more and Congress has given it increased funds for this purpose. He also expressed concern with the effect of the new NSF academic facilities modernization program on research funding by NSF. He expressed hope that increased funding for the facilities program will lead to the demise of pork-barrel academic facilities funding.

Green also mentioned his role in trying to obtain congressional approval for the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development survey of American sexual behavior. His understanding was that the prohibition language in the House committee report would not prevent the Department of Health and Human Services from giving the go-ahead to proceed with the pilot survey (see UPDATE October 20, 1989)."

Demographics Key to Crime Rates, Blumstein Says

Alfred Blumstein, dean of Carnegie-Mellon's School of Urban and Public Affairs, offered meeting attendees a look at his research on criminal behavior. Blumstein stressed the importance of demography in evaluating crime and incarceration rates and disputed claims that toughened enforcement can reduce criminal behavior.

In recent years, growing prison populations have garnered an increasing amount of public attention, focusing the spotlight on crime and incarceration rates. According to Blumstein, demographic changes are largely responsible for the rise in prison populations, with baby boom Americans entering into the high-crime teenage years at about the same time that crime rates began their upward trend.

Using that premise, Blumstein predicted in the late 1970s that the crime rate would peak in 1980. The high point would be followed by a decline throughout the 1980s and a subsequent upturn in the late 1990s. Blumstein also forecast that prison populations would climb until about 1990, reflecting the time crimes take to work their way through the criminal justice system. A peak in prison commitments would occur around 1985, he predicted, followed by relative stability after 1990.

As it turned out, all these predictions turned out to be reasonably accurate. The combination of a falling crime rate and a climbing incarceration rate was bound to elicit arguments that the latter caused the former, Blumstein said, but demographic analysis suggests that both trends can be explained by the population increase among high-risk age and race groups. The connection between beefed-up enforcement and lower crime rates is a specious one, according to Blumstein, and attempts to reduce

crime by cranking up sanctions are doomed to failure.

In the case of drug abuse, Blumstein noted, boosting sanctions for sellers is "demonstrably ineffective." Jailing incapacitates sellers, he said, but new suppliers step in to meet the existing demand. "Locking up a drug seller is not going to reduce those crimes on the corner he was inhabiting," Blumstein contended. Moreover, the threat of incarceration is far overshadowed by the threat posed by rival drug sellers.

Demographic trends indicate that worsening crime rates await the nation, with a substantial rise in prison populations looming around the turn of the century. We must prepare now, he said, for the information needs of the future. The sort of research needed to yield that information has a long lead time, he concluded, and needs to be started now.«

Featherman Outlines SSRC Role and Future

Also speaking at the conference was David Featherman, president of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). While noting the extensive mutual interests of COSSA and SSRC, Featherman described crucial characteristics of the council that set it apart from COSSA and all other social science organizations. The council, he said, should be considered neither a representative organization nor a federation of disciplinary associations. Rather, the council is best described, he contended, as a consortium of social scientists, drawing its strength from the participation of individual scholars working on the frontiers of social science research.

The council, Featherman explained, is the only nationwide body devoted exclusively to advancing social science research. Free from the political pressures of a government-sponsored organization and unencumbered by the disciplinary boundaries of its founding associations, the SSRC is uniquely situated to promote groundbreaking social science research. He stressed the novel and sometimes intellectually risky nature of much SSRC-sponsored research.

In response to charges of elitism that sometimes surround the council, Featherman granted that the charge is in some sense valid. The SSRC seeks the participation of the nation's very best social scientists, he said, with outstanding scholars exploring pressing national problems. "[The council] is elitist in the sense of applying an uncompromising commitment to finding the best available talent to work on the toughest intellectual problems at the boundaries of the social science disciplines," Featherman said.

Over the next few years, Featherman continued, the council will "embark on a new era of international social science research" focused on comparative and transnational research. Featherman reported that he has requested a reevaluation of how the council promotes scholarship on foreign cultures, political

systems, and international relations. New research, he predicted, will be shaped by a "transnational hypothesis" that will create a new structure for international social science; a structure that will reflect a world situation less concentrated by territorially discrete cultures, autonomous nation states, and by affairs between those states.

In addition, Featherman hopes to increase the council's work on the substance and methods of social science. In earlier years the SSRC was a leader in advancing the frontiers of social science methodology.

Finally, the council will try to assess future demands on social science, particularly the growing need to replenish the ranks of social scientists. The SSRC, Featherman said, needs to examine what it can do to help prepare the social sciences for the years ahead, and, among other efforts, must take the lead in "reconceptualizing how we develop interests and competencies of now under-represented minorities in careers in the social sciences."

Featherman closed his talk with a pledge to work in close cooperation with COSSA. Despite the organizations' distinct structures and goals, he said, they have important areas of common interests in which they can cooperate.

FOREIGN DEBT THREATENS U.S. ECONOMY, ACCORDING TO NOBEL LAUREATES

The United States must increase its national savings rate and reduce its dependence on foreign capital, according to two Nobel Prize winning economists. In November 15 testimony before the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, chaired by Sen. Don Riegle (D-MI), economists Paul A. Samuelson, Institute Professor Emeritus at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Lawrence Klein, Benjamin Franklin Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, warned of the dangers brought on by growing American indebtedness.

Samuelson, a 1972 Nobelist, noted that since the late 1940s, the U.S. share of world output has fallen from 40 percent to 23 percent. The decline "came not from a failure of our performance," he said, but from the "remarkable sprint by the Common Market and Pacific Rim nations, in which they have reduced but not obliterated our gap of superiority over their technology." What the U.S. must now do, Samuelson continued, is eliminate its chronic (or structural) deficit. The shortfall, he said, "is an over-consuming evil with insidious long-run consequences for American might and affluence" (his emphasis).

Although the United States is now the world's leading debtor nation, Samuelson explained, the current situation resembles recent years in South Korea, where foreign capital was used to build industrial plants, improve the quality and quantity of new machinery, and finance new productive ventures. But while foreign investments will enlarge Americans' productivity wages in the

coming years, he warned, "they will create a situation where America will owe an appreciable fraction of her total wealth and will have to pay out interest and dividends that begin to be an appreciable fraction of our total productive income."

An equally cautionary note was sounded by Klein, a 1980 Nobelist. While the economy is generally prosperous, he said, trouble spots exist. "We have not abolished the business cycle," he said, and revised growth data indicate that a mini-recession occurred during the first quarter of 1986. Like Samuelson, Klein argued that the low saving, low investment orientation of the economy must be reversed, and went on to call for policies that promote both higher personal saving and more capital formation by American companies. Above all, he said, the twin deficits of the federal budget shortfall and the current account deficit must be corrected.

In response to Sen. Phil Gramm (R-TX), a former economics professor at Texas A&M, both witnesses rejected any policies that would limit foreign investment in the U.S., although Samuelson added the caveat that foreign investors must play within "the normal rules of good conduct." Sen. Riegle suggested that such a notion of fair play is something most Japanese investors don't understand. Klein also argued for revisiting the 1986 tax reform act to help deal with the savings rate problem. The reform's consumption incentives, he said, have given rise to a number of macroeconomic problems.«

FROMKIN NAMED TO COSSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Victoria Fromkin, professor of linguistics and former vice chancellor for academic affairs/dean of the graduate division at the University of California, Los Angeles, was named to the Consortium's Board of Directors at its meeting on November 6.

Fromkin, who will serve a two-year term, has been president and secretary-treasurer of the Linguistics Society of America, a member of the Executive Board of the Center for Applied Linguistics, and is currently the United States delegate to and Executive Committee member of the Permanent International Committee on Linguistics. She has written extensively on language and the brain.

Re-elected to the Board of Directors were Thomas Malone, immediate past president of Sigma Xi -- the Scientific Honorary Society, and Darlene Clark Hine, professor of history at Michigan State University.«

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