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FEATURED ARTICLE

House Passes NSF, Census, NIJ Funding Bill for FY 2015

After two days of amendments and debate, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the fiscal year (FY) 2015 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations bill (H.R. 4660) on May 30. As [previously reported](#), the bill would provide increased FY 2015 funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), Census Bureau, National Institute of Justice, among other agencies.

The debate saw dozens of amendments on a broad array of topics, given the bill's wide-ranging jurisdiction. A number of amendments were approved that would impact social and behavioral science if the bill were to be enacted into law:

- An amendment offered by **Rep. Lamar Smith** (R-TX), Chairman of the House Science Committee, reduces the amount in the bill for NSF's Research and Related Activities (R&RA) account (the account that funds NSF's science directorates) by \$15.35 million and then adds the funds back in to the R&RA account. Smith stated on the floor that by reducing the R&RA account by \$15.35 million and adding it back in, he intends for NSF to take the funding away from SBE and reallocate it to "physical science and engineering." This maneuver is largely symbolic as the CJS appropriations bill does not appropriate specific funding levels for NSF's individual science directorates. Smith called this the "first step" in efforts to cut SBE funding. The amendment was approved by a vote of [208-201](#), with a number of Republicans changing their vote from yea to nay at the very end. Five Democrats voted in favor of the amendment and 18 Republicans voted against it.
- An amendment by **Rep. Ted Poe** (R-TX) was adopted by voice vote making the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) voluntary, which advocates hope will be removed in conference with the Senate.
- Several amendments were approved that would use the **Census Bureau** budget as an offset for increases to other programs. In total, Census would be reduced by at least 20 percent following the cuts approved during the Committee markup and on the House floor.

Several Democratic Members came to the House floor to speak in defense of the social and behavioral sciences, including Reps. Chaka Fattah (D-PA), [David Price](#) (D-NC), Rush Holt (D-NJ), and Daniel Lipinski (D-IL).

The Senate CJS Appropriations Subcommittee has scheduled a markup of its FY 2015 CJS Appropriations bill for June 3 with a full committee markup on June 5; the bill has not yet been released.

You can continue to follow COSSA's real-time coverage of the FY 2015 appropriations process by following us on Twitter [@COSSADC](#) and [#Stand4Science](#).

CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITIES & NEWS

House Science Committee Passes FIRST Act; Seeks Cuts to SBE

On Wednesday, May 28, the House Science, Space and Technology Committee completed its [markup](#) of the *Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science and Technology Act* (H.R. 4186), or FIRST Act. The Committee began markup of the bill last week, but an onslaught of Democratic amendments and requests for recorded votes delayed completion of the markup until this week. Democratic amendments aimed at stripping out troublesome provisions were defeated and the bill

ultimately passed out of committee along party lines. In addition, the Committee approved along party lines an amendment offered by Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) cutting the authorization level for the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) Directorate by an additional \$50 million to a total budget of \$150 million for FY 2015. The approved Rohrabacher amendment essentially reverses the Lipinski amendment that was adopted during the Subcommittee markup that added \$50 million to the SBE budget to bring the total SBE authorization to \$200 million (which would still have represented a 22 percent cut).

It is unclear if or when the FIRST Act will be brought to the House floor for a vote as the legislation has become increasingly partisan and divisive in recent weeks. Regardless, the bill is largely viewed as a non-starter in the Senate, which is still reportedly preparing its version of America COMPETES reauthorization legislation.

FEDERAL AGENCY & ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES & NEWS

"Operationalizing Culture" for Health Behavior and Social Sciences Research

On May 23, as part of the behavioral and social science lecture series, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) held a panel discussion on "Culture, Research, and Health Outcomes." Panel presenters included Marjorie Kagawa-Singer, University of California, Los Angeles; Peter Guamaccia, Rutgers University; and Laura Szalacha, The Ohio State University. The event was cosponsored by the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) and the NIH Basic Behavioral and Social Science Opportunity Network (OppNet). The distinguished panel discussion centered on measuring specific cultural variables in basic research and translating that into interventions and other clinical research that can improve health outcomes. OBSSR/OppNet plans to release online publication, *Cultural Framework for Health*, that will include recommendations to provide six checkpoints to facilitate a more thorough accounting for cultural processes in research. [Read on](#) for COSSA's complete report on the panel.

National Advisory Mental Health Council Meets

On May 22, the National Advisory Mental Health Council (NAMHC) held its May 2014 meeting. In his report to the NAMHC, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) director Tom Insel highlighted the recent increased attention to mental health, particularly the mental health care system. His update included a report on the Institute's role in the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative; NIMH's new priorities, which include the recently announced new experimental therapeutics approach to clinical trials and released new clinical trials funding opportunities; Congress's interest in serious mental illness and the accompanying expected increase in collaboration between NIMH and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); the creation of the new Research Domain Criteria (RDoc) Unit within the NIMH Office of the Director; and the Institute's plans to merge the Division of Adult Translational Research and the Division of Developmental Translational Research into an integrated Division of Translational Research, effective October 1, 2014. [Read on](#) for more details.

AHRQ Releases Annual Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) released the 2013 [National Healthcare Quality Report](#) (NHQR) and [National Healthcare Disparities Report](#) (NHDR). The congressionally-mandated reports provide annual updates on "national trends in the quality of health care provided to the American people" and "prevailing disparities in health care delivery as it relates to racial factors and socioeconomic factors in priority populations." The NHQR and NHDR follow more than 200 measures of health care process, outcomes, and access. Key findings from the 2013 reports include the following:

The quality of health care in America is only fair, but it is slowly improving.

- On average, Americans received 70 percent of recommended health care services.
- Areas that are showing most improvement are hospital care, measures reported publicly by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), and adolescent vaccines.
- Areas that are lagging behind include ambulatory care, diabetes care, and maternal and child health.

Americans' access to health care is also fair, but it has gotten worse over time.

- Twenty-six percent of Americans reported difficulty in accessing health care (compared to 24 percent in 2002).
- Improvements were reported in people's ability to access their health care provider by phone, but those with private insurance reported having more difficulty accessing health care services.

The state of health disparities in the U.S. is poor, and it has not changed.

- Improvements have been seen in HIV and patients' perception of care.
- However, disparities are widening in cancer screening and maternal and child health.

NCHS Releases Preliminary Birth Data for 2013

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has released [Births: Preliminary Data for 2013](#). The report's data, drawn from the National Vital Statistical System, covers age, race, birth order, marital status, cesarean delivery, preterm births, and low birth weight. Some highlights include:

- The preliminary number of births in 2013 was just under 4 million, slightly more than in 2012.
- The teen birth rate reached a historic low, down 10 percent from 2012.
- The birth rate for women aged 20-29 declined in 2013, but rose for women aged 30-49.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Office of Minority Health Funding Opportunities: Health Care Coverage, Minority Youth Violence, Youth Empowerment

The Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH) is seeking applications for its **Partnerships to Increase Coverage in Communities Initiative**, the purpose of which is to "identify, assist and educate minority populations about the Health Insurance

Marketplace and coverage opportunities made possible by the Affordable Care Act." OMH is looking for applications that will "assist individuals from underserved and/or hard to reach populations in applying for health insurance coverage through the Marketplace, providing guidance on financial assistance and coverage options to reach minority populations who are targeted for enrollment. " More information is available [here](#). Applications are due by June 16, 2014.

In collaboration with the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), OMH is soliciting applications for **Minority Youth Violence Prevention: Integrating Public Health and Community Policing Approaches**. Funding will support "program interventions developed through adaptations, refinements, and modifications of promising violence prevention and crime reduction models that are tailored to at-risk minority male youth (ages 10-18) and integrate a problem-solving approach." The full solicitation is available [here](#). Applications are due by June 13, 2014.

OMH is also seeking applications for its **Youth Empowerment Program II**, which seeks to use evidence-based practices to address unhealthy behaviors in at-risk minority males (10-18 years). The program aims to "demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of strategic partnerships in improving the health status of at-risk minority male youth by addressing youth violence and the resolution of conflicts in a nonviolent manner, low educational attainment, school suspensions and dropout, refusal skills with respect to reduction in substance abuse, counseling and behavioral health, cultural beliefs associated with sexual risk behavior among males, and enhancing the community's capacity to facilitate and sustain mentoring support services for at-risk minority male youth." More information is available [here](#). Applications are due by June 13, 2014.

COSSA MEMBER ACTIVITIES

Congressional Briefing on the War on Poverty: 50 Years Later - June 9

On June 9, the Population Association of America, a COSSA Governing Member, will host a Congressional briefing titled "[The War on Poverty - 50 Years Later and the Battle Continues](#)." The lunchtime event will feature Kathleen Short, Census Bureau; John Iceland, Pennsylvania State University; and Colleen Heflin, University of Missouri. The panelists will review the last 50 years since the War of Poverty was declared and what it means today for an estimated 46 million Americans to live in poverty. RSVP is required by June 6. COSSA is a sponsor of the event.

APSA Briefing Discusses the Science of Election Forecasting

On May 28, the American Political Science Association (APSA), a COSSA Governing Member, sponsored a briefing to discuss "[The Science of Election Forecasting](#)." Election forecasting has become more and more informed by science and research, and the popularity of election forecasts has increased dramatically since 2008 with the success of forecasts such as [FiveThirtyEight](#). The panelists for the briefing included Mark Blumenthal, *The Huffington Post*; Matthew Dickinson, Middlebury College; Michael Lewis-Beck, University of Iowa; Drew Linzer, *The Daily Kos*; Mary Stegmaier, University of Missouri; and Lynn Vavrek, University of California, Los Angeles.

Stegmaier and Lewis-Beck stated that election forecasting is a public good; it helps inform voters and engage the public in the political discussion. Recognizing its growing importance, campaigns and interested observers have honed their forecasting techniques to create better forecasts.

Dickinson provided his take on the 2012 election and why some forecasts succeeded while others failed. Despite many media narratives, the traditional axioms of political science, such as "incumbents usually win," had the most influence in predicting the winner of the election.

Vavreck, who writes for the political science-oriented [Monkey Cage](#) blog at the *Washington Post*, discussed her research in terms of election forecasting. She analyzed the last 16 presidential elections, and learned that 75 percent of the winners won because of economic conditions. Thus, she argued, economic conditions are the most important indicator in predicting the winner of an election, but campaigns also matter because if a candidate doesn't adequately stress the economy their opponent could still win.

Linzer argued, however, that 16 elections is simply not a large enough sample from which to produce accurate predictions, which explains why many forecasts are wrong. He emphasized the importance of stating the uncertainty inherent in these forecasts, and believes that the science and technology around forecasts will continue to improve. Finally, Blumenthal, who writes about polling and forecasts for the *Huffington Post*, suggested that the controversy around forecasting is caused by the public's misunderstanding of the difference between forecasting and polling. Polling, he said, is a snapshot of a moment in time whereas forecasting is a combination of many factors.

AAPSS Briefing Addresses How Policy Should Respond to Mass Incarceration

On May 28, American Academy of Political and Social Science, a COSSA member, in cooperation with Rep. Robert "Bobby" Scott (D-VA) and the Congressional Black Caucus, held a briefing titled "[The Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration: How Punishment has Changed America and How Policy Should Respond](#)." The briefing examined the effects of mass incarceration on American society and discussed research-backed policy recommendations to reduce crime, recidivism, and incarceration. The panelists included Christopher Wildeman, Yale University; Bruce Western, Harvard University; Glenn Martin, President and Founder of JustLeadership USA; Rep. Cedric Richmond (D-LA); and Rep. Scott. It was moderated by John Laub, former Director of the National Institute of Justice and professor at the University of Maryland.

Rep. Scott and Laub's opening remarks stated, in no uncertain terms, that current policy, and the uniquely high levels of incarceration it has led to, is dangerous to society and leads to more crime than it prevents. Wilderman looked at some research behind this claim. Specifically, there are many obvious and subtle "collateral consequences" to incarceration, such as the effects it has on children whose mothers or fathers spend long periods of time in prison; the effects incarceration has on communities through negatively affecting public health or through increasing crime rates; and the monetary costs to those incarcerated, their families, and to the American taxpayer.

Martin spoke in more detail about how incarceration has failed individuals because of the perverse incentives it creates. Our current system, he said, makes it so difficult for individuals to reenter society once released that it should be no surprise that many of them find themselves back in prison. This is due to many reasons, such as massive debts accrued while in prison, the difficulty in finding jobs either due to lack of qualifications or through employer discrimination, or through societal alienation caused by serving time in prison.

Western, who recently collaborated with the National Academies on a report, [Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration](#), detailed their research findings. Notably, 37 percent

African-American men aged 20-39 who dropped out of high school are currently incarcerated. This rate is 100 times higher than college-educated white males. Two million children have a parent who is incarcerated. Moreover, there is no strong evidence in the research that incarceration reduces any crime. As such, the National Academies report recommends a reexamination of the values that affect currently policy: (1) parsimony; (2) proportionality; (3) citizenship; and (4) social justice. To effect these changes in values, policy changes could include sentencing reform, improving the conditions of confinement, and increasing employment opportunities.

Finally, Rep. Richmond spoke about some of the troubles facing his native Louisiana in terms of high rates of incarceration in the context of a larger, broken system. Legislation and policy, he said, are often in a rush to deal with a specific problem and, in doing so, bigger mistakes are made. Positive policy changes must seek to change the mindset of people once they are released from penal institutions.

New COSSA Member: Institute for Social Science Research

COSSA is pleased to welcome the [Institute for Social Science Research](#) (ISSR) to the COSSA membership. ISSR is housed within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. COSSA's full membership list can be viewed [online](#).

Consortium of Social Science Associations Members

Governing Members

American Anthropological Association
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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.

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