



COSSA's Post-Election Analysis and 2025 Preview

December 18, 2024

As the 2024 election season comes to an end, COSSA is turning its attention to the future and the potential policy proposals from the incoming Administration and 119th Congress. With President-elect Trump having won the electoral college and popular vote, the House remaining under Republican-control, and the Senate shifting from Democratic to Republican-control, the incoming Administration will have a trifecta with slim majorities in both chambers. As the transition team prepares for the next four years, Trump's Cabinet nominees are front and center as are his potential policy proposals that could impact the SBS community, including NIH reform efforts, challenges to scientific integrity policies, tax reform, and budget cuts to federal science agencies across the government.

The following pages provide an overview of the election outcomes as they pertain to funding and policy impacting federally supported social and behavioral science research. We discuss some of the new players in the incoming Trump Administration and Congress as well as provide a preview of some of the topics we expect will have the attention of policymakers next year. Additional discussion on these topics occurred during a December 5, 2024 webinar hosted by COSSA. A recording is available at: <https://cossa.org/event/cossa-town-hall-post-election/>.

Transition to Trump 2.0

All eyes are on President-elect Trump as he announces his cabinet appointments and potential policy proposals, including calls to dismantle the Department of Education, reform the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and "Drain the Swamp."

President-elect Trump has [tapped](#) **Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to serve as Secretary of HHS**, a position that requires Senate confirmation. In [previous remarks](#), Kennedy has indicated his intent to lay off 600 employees from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and halt research on infectious diseases. In a Congressional committee hearing on the NIH budget in November, current Director Monica Bertagnoli indicated that such a move would be "disastrous" for the organization and could result in an increase in deaths relating to infectious disease (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)).

Alongside RFK Jr., President-elect Trump has [nominated](#) **Dr. Jay Battacharya**, a Stanford University physician and Director of the Center on the Demography and Economics of Health and Aging, **to lead the NIH**. Battacharya gained national attention following his criticism of the NIH's response to the COVID-19 pandemic while testifying during a [House Oversight and Accountability Committee hearing in 2023](#). If Battacharya is confirmed, he plans to work alongside Kennedy to "restore trust in science" through robust reform of the agency.

Another political [nominee](#) of President-elect Trump is former Florida Congressman **Dave Weldon to lead the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**. If confirmed, Weldon is likely to propose budget cuts and restructuring, including calls to remove vaccine safety research from the CDC and house it in a [new and separate HHS department](#).

Trump recently [named](#) tech venture capitalist and PayPal cofounder **David Sacks** to a newly created position of “**AI czar**” along with leading the **President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST)**. While little detail is known about Trump’s plan for PCAST, the naming of Sacks as chair signals that the council will be maintained in Trump’s second term. This is notable particularly because during Trump’s first term, PCAST was not reconstituted until almost three years into his presidency.

Additional changes are expected across agencies important to the SBS community.

For other positions, appointees are expected to serve set terms. An example is the Director of the **National Science Foundation (NSF)**, a position that has a 6-year term. Current Director Sethuraman Panchanathan was appointed by Trump in 2020 with a term ending in 2026. Another example is the **Census Director**, who serves a 5-year term. Director Robert Santos was appointed in 2022. But as with all political appointees, any may be asked to resign at any time.

Many of the positions COSSA will be watching will require confirmation by the Senate. With the slim Republican majorities in the House and Senate, any party defections could sink a nominee’s chances. Therefore, confirmation of Trump’s nominees is not guaranteed, and it is possible we may see new names put forward, as with the nominee for Attorney General and possibly Defense Secretary. Consideration of Trump nominees will take up considerable time in the Senate next year.

The Federal Workforce

As Inauguration Day approaches, Trump has called for “Draining the Swamp,” and could issue executive orders on day one to achieve it. One such order would create a new class of federal employees, known as **Schedule F**, which would make career bureaucrats easier to terminate if they are not aligned politically or ideologically with the Administration. Trump originally issued this order at the end of his first term; it was quickly reversed by the Biden Administration (see previous COSSA coverage on Schedule F [here](#).)

President-elect Trump has also indicated that he would **shrink the federal workforce** through “return to office policies” and relocating federal agencies outside of the DC-metro area, which would likely result in mass resignations. For example, in 2020, Trump relocated the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to Colorado which resulted in the resignation of [135 of the total 176 agency employees](#).

The cuts to the federal workforce may also impact science agencies with the pledge by RFK Jr. to reduce the NIH workforce by 600 employees.

“Department” of Government Efficiency

While on the campaign trail, Trump stated that if re-elected he would appoint Elon Musk to a new position to oversee government efficiency. The “Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE),” despite its name, would not be a federal department but rather an external advisory body with a direct line to the

President. Musk and former GOP Presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy were announced as co-chairs of the new entity.

The advisory body is tasked with making recommendations to the President on how to shrink the federal budget and workforce, with a goal of identifying \$2 trillion worth of cuts from a \$6 trillion federal budget—while promising not to touch entitlement programs. This work is directed to be complete by July 2026.

In addition, Republicans in the House and Senate have already moved to create DOGE entities within their respective chambers to support the work of the President in identifying what they see as “waste, fraud, and abuse” of taxpayer dollars. A [new subcommittee](#) of the Oversight and Accountability Committee in the House has been created and charged with coordinating with the external DOGE body on identifying ways to shrink the federal government. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Green (R-GA) has been tapped to chair the subcommittee.

The House and Senate have also established **DOGE caucuses**, which are informal groups formed by members around a topic of common interest. The [House caucus](#) is co-chaired by Rep. Aaron Bean (R-FL) and Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) and the [Senate caucus](#) by Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA).

What does this mean?

Even though DOGE will not be a government agency, it will have heavy influence on the President. By eyeing \$2 trillion in cuts, every part of the federal budget is at risk, including funding for federal science agencies. We could be entering a period of extreme budget austerity.

In addition, DOGE is likely to identify specific activities and initiatives for elimination, especially those that appear at odds with the President’s ideals (e.g., Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) activities). These efforts are not limited to the external DOGE group or the House and Senate DOGE actions. We are already seeing an uptick in criticism of certain research activities. First is a [report](#) issued in October by **Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX)** accusing NSF of “politicizing the use of taxpayer dollars” by supporting DEI-related projects. The report calls out nearly 3,500 research grants that Cruz asserts are politically motivated. As the incoming chair of the Senate committee with oversight for NSF, this investigation could receive even more attention next year.

The second example of increased scrutiny of federally-supported research is a [letter](#) from **Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA)**, in her capacity as chair of the new Senate DOGE Caucus to Musk and Ramaswamy, detailing her own priorities for targeted cuts, including a section on research and calls out specific projects. While attacks in individual research grants, disciplines, and initiatives are not new, we appear to be heading into an upswing of efforts to criticize and possibly defund research deemed by some to be not “in the public interest.”

The 119th Congress

The U.S. House of Representatives will remain under Republican-control, with a slim 220-215 majority. In the Senate, Republicans will hold a narrow majority next year, taking the reins from the Democrats, which will put the President’s party in control of confirmation of political appointees.

Reorganization is expected among party leadership and within Congressional committees. COSSA will be closely following various committee developments and will profile each committee in future editions of the [COSSA Washington Update](#). For now, here is a preview.

House Committees

COSSA is watching the changes in leadership and members of the below committees of the U.S. House of Representatives. These are the primary committees with funding and oversight authority for federal science agencies.

Appropriations Committee

Leadership changes are not expected for the House Appropriations Committee. Chairwoman Kay Granger (R-TX) relinquished the chairmanship in April in anticipation of her retirement from Congress (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)). **Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK)** took over as Chair and is expected to remain in that position in the next Congress. **Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)** will stay on as the Ranking Democrat.

On the ***Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) Appropriations Subcommittee***—the Appropriations subcommittee that sets the annual budgets for NSF, Department of Justice, Census Bureau, and many other agencies—Ranking Member Matt Cartwright (D-PA) lost his Congressional seat in a competitive race. **Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY)**, the senior Democrat on the committee and vocal advocate for the Census Bureau, is likely to take over as CJS Ranking Member. **Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY)** is expected to continue as Chairman of the CJS subcommittee.

For the ***Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee***—the subcommittee with funding responsibility for the NIH and other HHS agencies, Department of Education, Department of Labor, and other agencies—both Chairman **Robert Aderholt (R-AL)** and **Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)** are expected to remain in their respective roles. Earlier this year, Aderholt requested public input alongside Rep. Cathy McMorris-Rodgers (R-WA), Chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, on a framework to reform the NIH, including a consolidation of NIH's institutes from 27 to 15 (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)). The fiscal year (FY) 2025 House LHHS appropriations bill incorporated many of these recommendations, including the consolidation (see COSSA's analysis [here](#)). In a hearing on November 19, Aderholt expressed that he was disappointed by the research community's resistance to change. In response, NIH Director Bertagnolli reaffirmed the importance of all 27 NIH institutions as they represent the constituents and promise attention to the diseases that affect them (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)).

Science, Space, and Technology (SST) Committee

Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK) has reached his term limit as chair and therefore will step down at the end of this Congress; he is expected to remain on the committee as a member. **Rep. Brian Babin (R-TX)** has been appointed the new Chair and **Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)** will remain the Ranking Member of the committee for the Democrats. The Science Committee has authorization and oversight responsibilities for the NSF. Any legislation dealing with NSF must go through this committee.

Energy and Commerce Committee

The next Chair for the House Energy and Commerce Committee is currently unknown. The incoming Ranking Member will be **Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ)**. On the **Health Subcommittee**, the Chairman will remain **Rep. Brett Guthrie (R-KY)**, with an unknown incoming Ranking Member.

The Energy and Commerce Committee, despite its name, is responsible for authorization and oversight of the NIH. Any legislation aimed at reforming or otherwise altering the NIH will need to go through this committee.

Oversight and Accountability Committee

The House Oversight and Accountability Committee is not traditionally one that COSSA follows closely as it has broad jurisdiction and authority to investigate issues spanning the federal government. However, federal research agencies are getting the attention of the committee with respect to their implementation of Biden Administration executive orders and directives. The Committee has launched an investigation into the Biden Administration's Presidential Memorandum requiring federal agencies to develop [scientific integrity policies](#). In letters sent to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), **Chairman James Comer (R-KY)** claimed that these scientific integrity policies detrimentally impacted the executive agency of future Administrations (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)). Since all federal research agencies were directed under the Presidential Memorandum to develop scientific integrity policies, it is possible that Comer's investigation could spread to other agencies.

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) has been named the Ranking Member of the committee.

Senate Committees

The balance of power in the Senate will shift to the Republicans next year and Senate committees will see new leadership. Below are the committees of most interest to the SBS community.

Appropriations Committee

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) is expected to take over as Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, with current **Chair Patty Murray (D-WA)** becoming the Ranking Democrat. On the **CJS Subcommittee**, we expect current Ranking Member **Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS)** to take over as Chair and current Chairwoman **Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)** to stay on as the Ranking Democrat. A similar swap is expected for the **LHHS Subcommittee** with current Chairwoman **Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)** becoming the Ranking Member and current Ranking Member **Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV)** taking over as Chair.

Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), currently Ranking Member of the HELP Committee, is expected to lead as Chair next year. In this role, we expect he will continue his efforts around NIH reform. Over the last year, Cassidy requested input from the research community on ways to improve the NIH, which resulted in a report with recommendations issued in May (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)). While both the House and the Senate have signaled intent to pursue reform of the NIH, Cassidy's process has been largely stakeholder focused, in stark contrast to Rep. Aderholt's process.

With the Senate flipping to Republican control, **Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT)** will become the Ranking Democrat on the Senate HELP Committee.

Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), currently Ranking Member of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, is expected to take over as Chairman next year, with **Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA)**, current Chair, becoming the Ranking Member. As noted above, Cruz has initiated an "investigation" into NSF grants supporting DEI activities, asserting that this funding is politically motivated. In his [report](#), Ranking

Member Cruz concluded that the Biden-Harris Administration had “weaponized science” and called for NSF to end all policies developed in response to the 2021 Biden-Harris DEI in science memorandum (see previous COSSA coverage [here](#)). With Cruz’s leadership shifting to Chair, it is possible that NSF will continue to see similar reports and challenges from the committee.

What COSSA is Watching

The COSSA watch-list is packed for 2025. We discuss several of these issues in greater detail during our December 5 post-election webinar, including:

- Nomination and confirmation of key Administration officials.
- Reversal of Biden Administration [executive actions](#) around scientific integrity, DEI, and other issues.
- Efforts to reauthorize/reform the NIH.
- Proposals to cut funding to federal science agencies or eliminate certain agencies altogether.
- Tax legislation, including proposals to change the tax code for nonprofit organizations.
- Targeted attacks on scientific research agencies and individual research projects.

We will be back with our full coverage in January.

For Additional Information

- COSSA Headlines Webinars:
 - [NIH Reform Proposals](#) (September 2024)
 - [Election 2024: Implications for Social and Behavioral Science Research](#) (December 2024)
 - [The Future of Social and Behavioral Science in Evidence-Based Policymaking](#) (December 2024)
 - Other COSSA webinars: <https://cossa.org/events/category/cossa-event/headlines/>
- COSSA Washington Update (newsletter): <https://cossa.org/washington-update/>
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This report would not be possible without the assistance of COSSA’s Government Relations and Public Policy Intern Paige Kirkham.