

Washington Insider

House Science Chair Derides Political Science

In an interview published in the September 15, 1997 issue of the *Science and Government Report*, U.S. House Science Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) appeared decidedly cool to social science research, especially political science research. When asked whether the social sciences were deserving of federal support, Sensenbrenner responded positively, saying, "There is a legitimate role for federal research in social science." He then added that he "would subordinate that, however, to the federal role in the 'hard' sciences."

His reason, he said, was that government spending should be targeted to science and technology research that directly contributes to the maintenance of the U.S.'s economic competitiveness. Sensenbrenner said he wanted to see a majority of government funds spent on research that allows "America to keep its technological edge over [its] principal competitors in the sale of manufactured products."

Asked whether the social sciences could contribute to that goal, Sensenbrenner said that he thought "the social sciences can contribute . . . but I do not want to see scarce dollars that are available used for anthropological or political science studies—and you're talking to someone who has a degree in political science."

1998 Federal Budget Takes Shape, Key Programs Saved

During the last week of September and the first week of October, Congress hammered out the final provisions of the 1998 federal budget. Of particular interest to the political science community, the legislators raised NSF's appropriation 4.7% from 1997, increased funding for the NEH to \$110.7 million, and agreed to retain and strengthen AmeriCorps, whose new \$426 million budget is \$23 million higher than last year's. Both NEH and AmeriCorps had been targeted for deep budget cuts by U.S. House Republicans, and some critics of the two programs have proposed their complete elimination.

On a related note, anthropologist William R. Ferris, current director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, has been nominated by the White House as the next chairman of the NEH.

Graduate Student Tuition Waivers to Remain Untaxed

In early August, the U.S. Senate killed a House-approved revision of the tax code which would have made graduate students liable for income tax on the tuition waivers and reductions they receive as part of their financial aid packages. In a similar action, a proposal to make tuition aid given to children attending institutions where their parents work as faculty or staff was removed from the final tax bill in September.

Increases in College Enrollments Projected, Questioned

Projections of Education Statistics to 2007 (available for sale on-line at <http://www.ed.gov/NCES/>) predicts that the number of high school graduates nationwide will rise

by 18% over the next 10 years and that a majority of students receiving high school diplomas will attend college full time. Enrollment in public colleges and universities is projected to rise from 11 million to 12.6 million by 2007, and a smaller but still-significant rise is projected for private college enrollments. The number of bachelor degrees awarded is expected to increase 7%, from 1,181,000 in 1995 to 1,268,000 in 2007.

These projections were recently questioned by Patrick Healy, who noted in an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 15, 1997) that expected increases in higher education enrollments have failed to materialize in the states of Virginia and Washington. College and state officials interviewed for Healy's article agreed that enrollment forecasting has become "trickier" over the past few years because so many would-be students are making non-traditional educational choices such as taking time off between high school and college, enrolling in night school, and/or attending several institutions while pursuing a single degree.

Minority Enrollment, Achievement in College and Graduate School

The number of minorities who are U.S. citizens and permanent residents who are enrolled in graduate programs has more than doubled over the past two decades, from about 135,000 in 1976 to 271,000 in 1995, according to a report published in the August 1997 issue of *CGS Communicator*. Total graduate enrollment increased 30% over the period studied, but increases in minority enrollment were larger than increases in white enrollment, which stood at 101% and 15%, respectively.

The trend of increasing minority enrollments in graduate programs is likely to continue for the foreseeable future since, according to a recent report from The College Board, "first time college freshmen this fall are more ethnically diverse, better prepared academically, and more interested in postgraduate degrees than their predecessors." The same data also indicate that "minority students made up a record 32% of [high school] graduates who took the SAT in 1997, up from 22% in 1987." Another encouraging sign is that state support for higher education for all students seems to be increasing after many years of decline. Currently, only four states—Alaska, Connecticut, New Mexico, and Tennessee—have plans to reduce state funding for higher education, while nearly thirty state legislatures have passed budgets with increased funds for colleges and universities, reports Peter Schimdt in the August 8, 1997 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Additionally, recent legislative actions against affirmative action in admissions decisions may not have the adverse effect on minority gains in postgraduate education at first feared. The American Bar Association is currently studying proposals to deemphasize the role that standardized test scores play in law school admissions, and the state schools in Texas and California have begun implementing minority recruitment and placement programs.