

DATE: November 16, 2016
TO: AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION
FROM: Jonathan Skinner, Chair
American Economic Association Committee on Government Relations
RE: Annual Report for 2016

The current members of the American Economic Association Committee on Government Relations (CGR) are: Jonathan Skinner (Dartmouth, Chair), Katherine Baicker (Harvard), Mark Duggan (Stanford), Dana Goldman (USC), Maurine Haver (Haver Analytics), Charles Holt (Virginia), Susan Houseman (UpJohn), Bruce Meyer (UChicago), Karen Palmer (Resources for the Future), Nina Pavcnik (Dartmouth), Phillip Swagel (Maryland), and Betsey Stevenson (Michigan).

The CGR was established in 2009 to represent the interests of the economics profession in Washington, D.C. and other locations around the country. A description of the Committee's primary activities may be found on its [website](#). As is true of the AEA, the Committee does not take positions on questions of economic policy or on any partisan matter.

Phillip Swagel is replacing Jonathan Skinner as CGR chair beginning January 2017.

There are no Action Items for the Executive Committee this year.

In Memoriam: Charles Schultze (1924-2016) was a founding member of the CGR and served on the initial search committee with Robert Moffitt and Katherine Abraham to select the Washington representative, selecting Dan Newlon for the job. He served on the CGR from 2009-2012 and was the 2nd Chair of the committee after Katherine Abraham was called to serve on CEA, serving as Chair for one year, 2011. He helped set the general guidelines by which the committee operated. He coined the expression, "the CGR will not undertake any activity which a majority of the AEA membership would oppose (or any activity in which a significant minority would strongly oppose)", a principle we have maintained.

Meetings: Over this past year, the Committee met roughly once every four weeks by phone with Dan Newlon, the AEA Washington representative. Newlon also met frequently with representatives of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) and other organizations whose interests overlap with those of the AEA and with the relevant staffs at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

During the past year, discussions in our meetings were dominated by concerns about declining government support for economic research, including cutbacks in funding for research grants and for the collection and dissemination of economic data.

Outreach Activities: The CGR participated in meetings and conferences held by COSSA, the Coalition of National Science Funding, and the Social Behavioral Science Campaign to educate members of Congress about the value of social science research in general and specifically economics. These activities included.

- a well-attended Congressional talk by Angus Deaton, Princeton University on “Progress Reversed: The Importance of Health, Mortality, and Poverty for Public Policy.” The talk was co-sponsored by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Rep. Leonard Lance (R-NJ).
- a presentation by Bruce Meyer on “The Future of Data for Social Science Research” at the Coalition of National Science Funding Congressional Reception. Bruce also visited the offices of the Illinois Congressional delegation;
- CGR recruited Jeff Evans, a former NIH program director, and Kwabena Gyimah Brempong, a former NSF program director, to participate on teams visiting the staff of other members of Congress as part of the “COSSA Advocacy Day”; and
- Dan Newlon participated in meetings with Congressional staff by delegations of representatives of science associations and universities as part of the Social and Behavioral Science Campaign in support of NSF.

National Science Foundation: Newlon is part of a small NSF SBE support working group that meets regularly with NSF staff about how best to communicate the significance of NSF support of social science. At its last meeting in October, Newlon gave a presentation on the American Economic Association’s data availability policies. Newlon also meets regularly with NSF staff, including with France Cordova, the NSF Director, and Fay Lomax Cook, the head of the SBE Directorate.

The House passed an authorization bill for NSF that would have cut NSF's social, behavioral, and economic (SBE) sciences budget by as more than half. That version of the bill did not get any traction in the Senate.

National Institutes of Health: At the end of 2015 NIH issued the [NIH Guide Notice](#) on Health Economics to clarify NIH priorities for health economics research. According to the Guide Notice “a number of topics covered by health economics research, while still valuable research endeavors, are not sufficiently related to NIH's mission of improving health and reducing disability, and would be more appropriately sponsored by other organizations and agencies.” Concerns were also raised that NIH hiring practices were keeping NIH programs from hiring qualified economists as science administrators.

CGR members, especially Dan Newlon, Jon Skinner and Robert Moffitt, met frequently with NIH staff about the implementation of the NIH guidelines and about NIH hiring practices. Jon, as CGR chair, wrote a letter on how NIH hiring practices were keeping NIH from considering hiring qualified economists for NIH science administration positions.

Statistical Agencies: The CGR and AEA Stat jointly supported the statistical agencies; these efforts are described in the AEASat annual report.