

Committee on Government Relations

Members of the American Economic Association Committee on Government Relations (CGR) in 2017 are: Phillip Swagel (University of Maryland, Chair); Katherine Baicker, through March 2017 (Harvard); Sandra Black (University of Texas); Maurine Haver (Haver Analytics); Charles Holt (University of Virginia); Susan Houseman (UpJohn); Bruce Meyer (University of Chicago); Karen Palmer (Resources for the Future); Nina Pavcnik (Dartmouth); Betsey Stevenson (University of Michigan); and Ken Troske (University of Kentucky). Katherine Smith Evans replaced Dan Newlon as Director of Government Relations in March 2017.

The CGR was established in 2009 to represent the interests of the economics profession in Washington, DC 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.

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

Threats to the quality of economic statistics that were a concern at the January 2017 meetings have not materialized, even while concerns remain over funding of the statistical agencies. There has been no interference that we know about in the operations of the statistical agencies. The CGR continues to look for avenues to advise policymakers on the value of economic statistics and the importance of adequate funding for this to happen (while not advocating for any particular budgetary amount). To provide information on the value of economic statistics, the CGR is working with the AEA Economic Statistics Committee to develop documents on Principles of Economic Measurement for dissemination to policymakers, press, and the general public.

Meetings.—Over this past year, the Committee met roughly once every four weeks by phone with the Director of Government Relations. Newlon and Smith Evans 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 relevant staff people at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

Outreach Activities.—The CGR participated in meetings and conferences held by COSSA and the Coalition of National Science Funding (CNSF) to educate members of Congress about the value of social science research in general, and with specific regard to economics. These activities included:

- (i) Economists Jim Barth (Auburn), Laura Razzolini (University of Alabama), Georgia Kosmopoulou (University of Oklahoma), and Michele Boldrin (Washington University) were recruited to represent the AEA along with Smith Evans at the 2017 COSSA Science Policy Conference & Social Science Advocacy Day on March 29–30, 2017 in Washington, DC. Smith Evans led a team that visited congressional offices to explain the value of investment in social science research.
- (ii) Jonathan Meer (Texas A&M University) was recruited to represent AEA at the Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF) Exhibition and congressional reception on federally funded science. His poster on his research on charitable giving described a valuable contribution of economic research and drew considerable interest. He and Katherine Smith Evans also visited Senator Cruz's and Flores' offices where Meer summarized his research and where all discussed the value of economic research.

- (iii) The CGR was among 26 professional societies and groups that cosigned a letter to Frances Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), expressing concern about NIH's redefinition of and new procedures for considering clinical trials. The NIH new definition of clinical trial could mean that social science proposals to NIH that involve any differential treatment of experimental subjects (as in, for example, health behavioral economic research) would be classified as clinical trials and subject to new and onerous procedures for grant submission.

Furthering Representation of Economics on Science Boards and Committees.—The CGR promotes and supports the inclusion of economists on national commissions, scientific study panels, and other advisory committees. In 2017, this included the following activities:

- (i) The CGR spearheaded an effort that culminated in the AEA formally nominating and providing required nomination materials on Christopher Sims, Princeton University's John J. F. Sherrerd '52 University Professor of Economics, for membership on the National Science Board, an influential body that advises the US President on science matters and guides the NSF's portfolio of grants. The nomination is currently under consideration.
- (ii) Smith Evans notified a number of AEA members with expertise in research reproducibility about a call for nominations of experts for a National Academies of Science (NAS) Committee on Reproducibility and Replication in Science, and urged interested economists to self-nominate for membership on the NAS Committee, a call that was answered by Richard Ball (Haverford College) and Ted Miguel (UC Berkeley). The provisional NAS Committee, announced November 22, 2017, did not include any economists. The CGR is now responding to a call for comments on the provisional
- Committee's composition and balance, noting the absence of economists.
- Educating Congress on Legislation Affecting Availability of Statistics for Sound Social Science.*—
- (i) The CGR was among 21 professional societies and other professional groups that cosigned a letter to Representative Paul Gosar explaining that legislation sponsored by Representative Gosar could unintentionally preclude federal agencies from collecting geospatially specific demographic data by geographic area in federal surveys such as the decennial census, American Community Survey, and various public health and household surveys. The Gosar bill was later revised to avoid these unintended consequences.
- (ii) Phillip Swagel, Maurine Haver, and Dan Newlon met with staff from the Senate Finance Committee and House Ways & Means Committee as part of efforts to further consideration of data synchronization legislation that would allow improved sharing of business classification information between US statistical agencies. While merely a classification by industry, the information to be shared is formally a tax record, making this legislation politically controversial. Ultimately, legislation was not proposed, but the CGR's work with the Commerce Department assured the best effort possible in 2017.
- (iii) Phillip Swagel and Susan Houseman were members of an AEA Economic Statistics subcommittee developing AEA documents on Principles of Economic Measurement (summarized in a separate memorandum as an Action Item for the AEA Executive Board). These will provide information on economic statistics for policymakers, press, and the general public.
- Statistical Agencies.*—The CGR partnered with the AEA Committee on Economic Statistics in educating policy decision makers about federal statistical agencies and products. These activities are discussed in the AEA Stat

annual report, and include drafting and sending letters to:

- (i) The Senate Appropriations Committee on the value of economic statistics and the general need for adequate funding of federal statistical and science agencies; and
- (ii) Speaker Paul Ryan and Senator Patty Murray to express support for the findings of the Commission on Evidence Based Policymaking, describe data synchronization in the context of those recommendations, and encourage forward movement on legislation that codifies the Commission's recommendations.

PHILLIP SWAGEL, *Chair*