

[Similar letters sent widely to the Senate leadership]

October 12, 2009

Hon. Harry Reid
Office of the Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

I am writing because we have learned that Sen. Tom Coburn intends to propose an amendment to eliminate funding for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Political Science program when the Senate resumes consideration of the Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill on October 13. We strongly believe that this amendment is unwise and should be defeated.

NSF's Political Science program, with a very small amount of the Foundation's total budget, has provided support for research, data collection, and training that has expanded our knowledge of individual political behavior and beliefs, the nature of democratic societies, and mechanisms for international, national, state and local governance. These advances in knowledge have been acquired using the scientific method of testing hypotheses, collecting data to measure variables, and disseminating results that mark the best in our nation's scientific endeavors. In the explanation for the amendment Sen. Coburn denigrates the Political Science program for siphoning resources away from the "real fields of science." We submit that the systematic study of politics and political systems is indeed "real science."

The importance of Political Science and NSF's support for its systematic study was validated today with the Swedish Academy's announcement that political scientist Elinor Ostrom has won the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economic Science. Dr. Ostrom's extraordinary research into the politics and governance of the commons—how we share collective goods – supported by NSF's political science program, was the basis for her selection. This was truly **transformative research** as the Nobel Committee recognized.

In making his argument for his amendment on his Web Page, Sen. Coburn attacks NSF's support for the American National Election Studies (ANES), suggesting those who are interested in American political behavior simply

“turn to CNN, FOX News, MSNBC...” This is a misunderstanding of the importance of the systematic study of electoral behavior. The ANES is widely recognized as the world’s leading scientific study of elections, a project that has and continues to **transform** our understanding of that behavior. Its mission goes beyond a task to “inform explanations of election outcomes.” The ANES also strives to enrich and deepen the tools developed, refined, and tested by scientists for the purpose of understanding collective decision-making, generally, and key dynamics of modern governance, specifically. In addition, the ANES is frequently solicited by government agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, not just for data, but also for advice on how to better conduct their own data collections. Moreover, ANES regularly offers assistance to journalists and other members of the public who come to it seeking credible and unbiased data about public opinion. It has also trained innumerable students of politics, elections and public opinion.

Many other studies supported by NSF’s Political Science program continue to **transform** the understanding of our political world through systematic scientific investigations of democratization, the role of new media, terrorism and responses to terrorism, and many other facets of political life.

Again, we urge the defeat of the Coburn Amendment and support for NSF’s continued role as the world’s premier scientific agency supporting ALL the sciences.

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is the advocate for the social and behavioral sciences. COSSA is supported by over 110 professional associations, scientific societies, universities, and research centers and institutes (A membership list is attached). We serve as a bridge between the academic research community and the Washington policy making community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Howard J. Silver, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Encl.