

July 30, 2009

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update on our work

I'm pleased to report significant recent progress in our efforts to advance evidence-based reforms in government programs. Any thoughts or advice you have would be much appreciated.

1. The recently-enacted Supplemental Appropriations Act calls on the World Bank to conduct rigorous impact evaluations, through language developed with our input.

The Act states that "The Secretary of the Treasury shall seek to ensure that multilateral development banks rigorously evaluate the development impact of selected bank projects, programs, and financing operations, and emphasize use of random assignment in conducting such evaluations, where appropriate and to the extent feasible" (Public Law 111-32, June 24, 2009). The Multilateral Development Banks include the World Bank and four Regional Development Banks. Similar language is also included in a bill authored by Senators Kerry and Lugar that was recently approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (S. 954).

2. Congress' annual appropriations bills appear likely to fund major evidence-based Administration and Congressional initiatives for which we've provided key input. Specifically, the Labor-HHS-Education appropriations bill passed by the House last week includes –

- \$114.5 million to fund the Administration's proposed evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program, at least \$75 million of which goes toward "evidence-based programs that have been shown through rigorous evaluation, defined as randomized controlled trials, to reduce teenage pregnancy, delay sexual activity, or increase contraceptive use";
- \$15 million for HHS's evidence-based home visitation program, to "support models that have been shown in well-designed, randomized controlled trials to produce sizeable, sustained effects on important child and family outcomes";
- A \$32 million increase in funding for rigorous research at the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES); designation of IES as the lead agency within the Department for conducting Congressionally-authorized evaluations; and a requirement for IES to rigorously evaluate the Department's Teacher Incentive Fund using random assignment to the extent practicable; and
- Increases in funding for rigorous evaluations at the Department of Labor and Corporation for National and Community Service.

The corresponding Senate bill is pending, but we believe will also support many of these reforms. Separately, the House's draft health care reform legislation includes \$750 million over 5 years for the Administration's proposed major expansion of evidence-based home visitation (the Senate bill is under development).

OMB Director Peter Orszag, in recent Congressional testimony, specifically cited the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy's support for the evidence-based policy initiatives noted above.

3. We have developed two new evidence-based policy proposals for consideration by Administration and Congressional officials:

- [Overlooked Strategies To Reduce Health Care Costs](#) (1¼ pages). Some simple, proven strategies to cut costs have been overlooked that, if incorporated into the proposed health care reforms, could produce tens of billions of dollars in savings annually. What distinguishes these strategies from the vast majority of ideas for reducing cost is that these have been proven effective in rigorous randomized controlled trials that meet the evidence standards of the Food and Drug Administration and National Academy of Sciences, and therefore would likely meet the Congressional Budget Office's criteria for scoring savings in health care reform legislation.
- [Proposal: An Executive Order To Institutionalize Evidence-Based Approaches in Federal Social Programs](#) (2 pages). This short paper proposes a government-wide initiative, coordinated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), as a potential key to reviving stalled progress in poverty reduction, K-12 education, and other areas.

The recent National Academy of Sciences [recommendation](#) that evidence of effectiveness generally cannot be considered definitive without ultimate confirmation in well-conducted randomized controlled trials has helped accelerate Congressional and agency interest in the above reforms. We now reference it on our website, along with a statement that we support many types of research to identify promising programs that merit such confirmation.

I hope this update is helpful.