



An Occasional Note from the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics January 31, 2017

We are getting prepared to send letters and informational materials to new Cabinet appointees whose Departments include one or more statistical agencies. It will continue to be a busy time for those of us who inform and educate policymakers about the broad ranging utility and value of federal statistics.

Nancy Potok is the new U.S. Chief Statistician and Director of OMB's Office of Statistical and Science Policy. Dr. Nancy Potok is most recently the Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer of the U.S. Census Bureau. She previously served at the U.S. Department of Commerce as Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, the Census Bureau's Associate Director for Demographic Programs, and the Principal Associate Director and Chief Financial Officer in charge of Field Operations, Information Technology, and Administration during the 2000 Census. We congratulate Nancy, wish her the very best, and pledge to help her achieve her objectives in any way that COPAFS can.

Federal Statistics in the News. As the 115th Congress has gotten under way and the Trump Administration prepares to transition into the Executive Branch, a number of well-articulated news stories have emerged. In the January 10 *Washington Post*, Catherine Rampell reports on why economists fear a possible lack of support for statistical agencies' agendas: wpo.st/sagQ2. On January 3, Jeffrey Mervis wrote in *Science* about fears of an attack on federal statistics collection: <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/01/scientists-fear-pending-attack-federal-statistics-collection>. In a blog for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Matt Hourihan espouses broadly on potential effects on spending for science of all types: AAAS.org/Hourihan. The *Guardian* has published several thoughtful pieces on official statistics this month; one on how the declining ability of statistics to describe the world threatens democracy GuardianDaviesJan192017 and one quoting Katherine Wallman and Erica Groshen on the importance of statistics to inform public policy decisions GuardianChalabiJan302017 and here is a link to John Pullinger's excellent *Guardian* article on how statistics could provide an essential public service in a "post-truth" world GuardianPullingerJan312017. And there appears to be a growing number of other great articles, blogs and postings supporting federal statistics. Let's hope they are read by people with budgetary and policy influence on the federal statistical system.

Commission on Evidence Based Policymaking. COPAFS Executive Director, Kitty Smith Evans, listened in on testimony given to the Commission at its 2nd public hearing in Chicago. Among the issue that received attention from Commission members during dialogue with some excellent panel members (See agenda and testimony at <https://www.cep.gov/events/2017-01-05.html>) were the merits of a centralized versus a distributed administrative data clearinghouse, the need for budget-neutral recommendations, and the opportunity to propose actionable items the Commission might recommend to Congress. A January 13 Commission meeting in Washington, DC included testimony from State and international organizations that have developed administrative data access systems. The Commission's report will be made available in early September 2017.

A summary of COPAFS' December 3, 2016 Quarterly Meeting and slides from presentations are available at: <http://www.copafs.org/meetings/december2016.aspx> . The meeting included very useful guidance, from people in the know, for federal statistical agencies in the Trump Administration. It also introduced COPAFS' plans for activities to inform the Executive Branch transition. COPAFS transition materials, free for all to use, are available at that site. A draft example of our letters to Cabinet members whose Departments house one or more statistical agencies is attached.

Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (FCSM) December 6-7 Policy Conference a big success. Over 520 people from a variety of government, educational and business institutions attended the Policy Conference. Its theme was the future for survey statistics and alternative data. The agenda is available at: <http://www.copafs.org/UserFiles/file/2016FCSMPolicyProgramFinalWebVersion.pdf>. Presentations from the conference will be loaded on the COPAFS web site in February.

Congressional Appropriations are in limbo with proposals expected to crop up over the next 2 months. In the meantime, the Trump Administration and Republican leaders in the House have expressed interest in following budgetary policy guidelines developed by the Heritage Foundation <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2016/02/a-blueprint-for-balance-a-federal-budget-for-2017>, Its policy Blueprint would reduce the size of the federal government, hitting entitlement programs and discretionary funding hardest. If followed, there cut be continued stagnation if not substantial cuts in federal statistical programs.

New legislative proposals are being introduced at a rapid rate, some of which may affect statistics programs or access. With COPAFS member organizations, we have been following a bill proposed by Representative Gosar that would eliminate funding in HUD to maintain a program-related database. We are working with relevant Congressional staff to assure that the language they use to do this could not be inadvertently used to limit geo-specific demographic statistical collections.

News from Selected COPAFS Tweets

Those concerned about statistical policy description on OMB website can find it here: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/infoereg_statpolicy ... These archives are expected to be re-posted on the new OMB site.

Some good reasons we need accurate, objective public data broken down by race and ethnicity <http://nationalequityatlas.org/data-in-action/SaveTheData> ...

The full 2017 calendar of releases by the IRS Statistics of Income Division is now available at: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/2017soipublicreleaselist.pdf> ...

Forbes' list of 25 women who are leading and making a difference in U.S. federal statistics. Kudos to all! <http://www.forbes.com/sites/metabrown/2017/01/27/get-to-know-25-women-leading-data-and-analytics-in-the-us-government/4/#293c27274b8b>

The 2017 EIA Energy Conference is scheduled for June 26–27 in Washington, DC. Register now. <http://go.usa.gov/x9mRz>

Interesting developments in the UK re ethics of using secondary data in research 'It may be legal, but is it right?' <https://goo.gl/1R5lqo>

Moultan is concerned about statistical agency independence. Know that the directives he cites are guidance for real laws underlying them. <http://politicalarithmetic.com/2017/01/24/why-im-concerned-about-the-independence-of-u-s-statistical-agencies/>

Some interesting articles on data linkage to illuminate various social phenomena are in The Annals of the @TheAAPSS latest issue - New Big Science: Linking Data to Understand People in Context <http://ow.ly/QrRI307trXO>

Senate-passed Open Data Act has much to commend it, but puts data management in the hands of CIO's, not data scientists <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2852> ...

Great timeline of historical budget and appropriation actions may give insight into future issues in Brookings revisit of Obama's fiscal battles: <http://brook.gs/2hbplW9>

538 raises questions about federal data in the next Administration <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-trumps-white-house-could-mess-with-government-data/>

The Future of Business Survey is a collaboration among Facebook, OECD & World Bank to track the environment for small enterprise operation <https://eu.futureofbusinesssurvey.org/manager/Storyboard/RHViewStoryboard.aspx?>

Invited session submissions now open for International Conference on Health Policy Statistics. <http://ww2.amstat.org/meetings/ichps/2018/submitaproposal.cfm> ...

Data are vital building blocks for making sound policy. Listen to #podcast w/ IMF Statistics Director Ducharme <https://soundcloud.com/imf-podcasts/data-drives-better-decisions?hootPostID=898e9d53f27a9fbe77cdb397965ccb2b>