

LETTERS

Basic Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences

Colin Norman (News and Comment, 21 Sept., p. 1371) examines current science policy as reflected by the statements and actions of the two presidential candidates. The basic message is that the outcome of the election would make little difference, except in minor details, to basic science policy, which is described as having behaved about the same way under the Reagan Administration as during the previous Carter Administration.

In terms of overall resource allocation to basic research, that general impression is clearly correct. But there is one key area of basic research that is, on the record, unlikely to be treated equivalently under different regimes—public support for basic research in the behavioral and social sciences.

Norman notes that the Administration got off to a "rocky start" when they took an "ideological axe" to the National Science Foundation (NSF) research budget. But he leaves the impression that Administration policy was subsequently modified. It was, for basic research support generally. But it was not in the behavioral and social sciences.

The numbers tell the story. For the core NSF Social and Economic Science Division, the Reagan Administration originally proposed cuts that were tantamount to virtual elimination of the program—to a \$10-million level from the \$40-million Carter recommendation in the fiscal year (FY) 1982 budget and the \$33 million authorized in the FY 1981 budget. Congressional pressure forced the FY 1982 budget up to \$17.8 million—a cut that did severe damage but avoided disaster. In the Behavioral and Neural Sciences Division, the recommended cuts were substantial but smaller—to \$11 million from the \$28-million Carter FY 1982 recommendation and the \$25 million authorized in FY 1981, with Congress upping the amount to about \$15 million.

While subsequent Reagan Administration recommendations for the social and behavioral sciences have called for increases from these sharply reduced levels, there is no evidence that Administration policy has really backed off from the view that social science research is not very important. The Administration has consistently recommended increases for the Social and Economic Science Division that are below the average for NSF programs—and from a base which is half the size, in real terms, of FY 1980. That

actual increases have been larger is due mainly to consistent congressional upgrading of Administration budget requests. The FY 1985 budget level for these program areas is currently set at \$52.2 million—roughly \$28 million for the Social and Economic Science Division and \$24 million for the Behavioral and Neural Sciences Division—slightly less than the 1980 level in nominal terms, and substantially less in real terms.

Whatever the reasons may be for the Administration's negativism about basic research in the social and behavioral sciences, I believe they disregard the long-term consequences of science policy for society: a lengthy period of minimal support will have a significant impact on the inflow of new talent; it will significantly reduce increments to the stock of knowledge that forms an information base for political decisions; it will seriously impede the development of new ideas that are relatively expensive and cannot get a hearing in a tightly constrained budget environment; and it will cause retrogression in the degree to which the behavioral and social sciences become more solidly grounded in empirical knowledge and thus become more useful to policy-makers.

F. THOMAS JUSTER

*Institute for Social Research,
University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor 48106*

Dairy Product Consumption

Gina Kolata's article about calcium and hypertension (Research News, 17 Aug., p. 705) was informative and well written. The issue of blood cholesterol content and its role in atherosclerotic heart disease is closely associated with dietary calcium levels. In particular, a comment attributed to David McCarron appears to suggest that consumption of "sufficient" dairy products will help to ensure an adequate intake of dietary calcium.

Table 1.

	American cheese (2 oz.)	Low-fat milk (16 oz.)	Nonfat milk (16 oz.)
Calcium	348	594	604
Cholesterol (mg)	54	36	8
Saturated fat (g)	11.16	5.84	0.57
Sodium (mg)	812	244	252
Calories	214	242	172

We advise caution in interpreting this to mean that individuals should increase their consumption of dairy products in general. The powerful results of the 10-year Coronary Primary Prevention Trial (CPPT)—Lipid Research Clinics (LRC) investigation demonstrate a significant decrease in coronary heart disease (CHD) events associated with a decrease of concentrations of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) in blood with the agent cholestyramine (1). In another study, egg consumption increased dietary cholesterol from 97 to 418 milligrams per day and elevated LDL-C in blood by 12 percent (2). The LRC data suggest that such an increase may result in a 19 percent increase in CHD risk. It would be ill advised for individuals to change their eating habits in ways that could increase their LDL-C and, thus, their CHD risk.

For example, consumption of American cheese can result in substantial elevations of dietary cholesterol and saturated fats, both of which have been established as sources of increased plasma LDL-C (3). Table 1 illustrates the relative amounts of calcium, cholesterol, saturated fat, sodium, and calories found in three dairy sources of dietary calcium. The values are based on two "servings" (4). American cheese could account for 44 percent of the adult recommended daily allowance (RDA) of calcium. For comparison, non- or low-fat (2 percent) milk could account for 75 percent of the RDA for calcium. In addition, American cheese contains 116 percent more calories than nonfat milk for an equivalent calcium content.

In order to encourage an optimal CHD risk profile, we stress the need to be selective about dietary sources of calcium and recommend consumption of those that are low in cholesterol, saturated fats, and sodium. The calcium-hypertension issue has yet to be resolved.

H. ROBERT SUPERKO

*Lipid Research Clinic and Laboratory,
Stanford University,
Stanford, California 94304*

DARLENE DREON

*Stanford Weight Control Project,
Stanford University*

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1. Lipid Research Clinics, *J. Am. Med. Assoc.* **251**, 351 (1984).
2. F. M. Sacks *et al.*, *Lancet* **1984-I**, 647 (1984).
3. D. B. Hegstead *et al.*, *Am. J. Clin. Nutr.* **14**, 281 (1965).
4. *USDA Agriculture Handbook*, No. 8-1 (1976).

Erratum: In the announcement of the 1985 winter schedule of the Gordon Research Conferences (5 Oct., p. 77), the dates for the conference "Multiple Opiate Receptors" (on p. 79) were incorrectly given. The conference will be held in February, not January. The days of the month were correct.