

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL LAUNCHES “TO SECURE KNOWLEDGE,” TASK FORCE FOCUSED ON ENSURING THE INTEGRITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND INDEPENDENCE OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

BROOKLYN, NY (April 20, 2017) – The [Social Science Research Council \(SSRC\)](#) is launching “To Secure Knowledge,” a task force that is born from the organization’s essential obligations to scholarship and the role rigorous understanding plays in public affairs.

The task force, in formation, will be composed of eight to 10 members that will include scholars from a range of the social sciences, as well as individuals that are or have served as business and government leaders and heads of major educational institutions. (See below for task force members to date.) The task force will begin its work presently and conclude with a report and recommendations in early 2018.

“To Secure Knowledge” will address five concerns:

First is the scope, integrity, and accessibility of the federal statistical system. Vital data are presently generated by more than 100 federal agencies, but especially by 13 whose primary mission is that of generating official statistics—Bureau of Economic Analysis; Bureau of Justice Statistics; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Bureau of Transportation Statistics; Census Bureau; Economic Research Service; Energy Information Administration; National Agricultural Statistics Service; National Center for Education Statistics; National Center for Health Statistics; National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics; Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (SSA); and Statistics of Income (IRS)—as well as NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Various challenges, including potentially severe budgetary constraints, are putting pressure on this vital basis of scholarly and policy knowledge.

Second is a set of concerns about the organizational arrangements for social research and policy knowledge. There is a wide range of essential institutions in both public and civil life that undergird the quest, across subjects and methods, for systematic understanding of human phenomena. These include our uncommonly robust network of colleges and universities, national endowments for the arts and humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health, among many others. Without simply embracing the status quo, the task force will seek to understand how best to secure the institutional conditions for the creation, dissemination, and utilization of social knowledge.

Third is the networks, patterns of interaction, and mobility of scholars. A great strength of the knowledge system of the United States has been its confident openness, characterized not only by a transparency of information and procedures, but by a global orientation that understands that the search for knowledge cannot be contained within any single country. For decades this approach has valued human exchanges, including the secure personal movement of scholars, and a quest

for unimpeded collaboration. Securing this approach is vital.

Fourth is the set of norms, conventions, and patterns of behavior that long have characterized the ways in which the knowledge community has fashioned and governed its criteria for assessing careers and scholarly contributions, including systems of peer review. In a world increasingly characterized by liquid, instant, and uncurated information, largely autonomous and demanding standard-setting criteria and institutions within the scholarly world take on a growing importance. Identifying and guarding the principles and activities deemed most fundamental is essential, as is both being open to adjustment and making them more transparent to the general public.

Fifth is the change in science policy stressing increased accountability for the public funding of science—accountability often linked to near-term contributions to national security and economic growth. This pressure affects the social sciences in ways that differ from the physical and health sciences, and thus requires careful attention to how the responsibility of the social sciences is framed and the criteria by which the social sciences are judged.

“For nearly a century, the SSRC has strived to mobilize the social sciences and their practitioners to produce scholarly work that in turn empowers policymakers and the public to make fully informed decisions,” said Ira Katznelson, president of the SSRC. “‘To Secure Knowledge’ builds on this history, with a mission and membership well-matched to address issues made pressing in this turbulent period.”

The group includes Bernadette Gray-Little (chancellor, University of Kansas), Rush Holt (former member of Congress who is chief executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science), Gary King (Harvard political scientist who directs that university’s Institute for Quantitative Social Science), Cora Marrett (a University of Wisconsin sociologist who has been deputy director at NSF), Kenneth Prewitt (a former SSRC president who headed the US Census Bureau at the close of the Clinton administration and presently is a professor of public policy at Columbia University), John Reed (former CEO at Citibank, a recent member of the SSRC board, and a former chair of the boards of the Russell Sage Foundation, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and MIT), and Amy Zegart (co-director of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford, and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution).

“To Secure Knowledge” builds on the SSRC’s history of utilizing the instrument of a task force from time to time to address particularly pressing concerns. The most recent was a Katrina Task Force that investigated the social dimensions of the response to Hurricane Katrina, as well as lessons that could be applied to similar disasters in the future.

For more information on the SSRC, visit <http://www.ssrc.org>

About the Social Science Research Council

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The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) is an independent, international non-profit with the mission of mobilizing social science to disseminate essential knowledge. Founded in 1923, the SSRC fosters innovative research, nurtures new generations of social scientists, deepens how inquiry is practiced within and across disciplines, and mobilizes necessary knowledge on important public issues. Based in Brooklyn, NY, the SSRC currently administers 22 programs in the U.S. and around the world. For more information on the SSRC and its programs, please visit www.ssrc.org.

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