

What They Would Have Said: APS Honors Patrick J. Kennedy

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Editor's Note: No matter what your mother told you, sometimes things don't always work out the way they're supposed to. But if Mom also told you that when one door closes, another opens, she's right on that score.

One of the events that was slated to take place during the Opening Ceremony of the 19th Annual APS Convention in Washington this past May was an award presentation to U.S. Representative Patrick J. Kennedy (D-RI), to recognize his steadfast support of basic behavioral science. Alas, it was not to be. The opening ceremony coincided with a critical Congressional debate and vote on Iraq funding, and Rep. Kennedy had to stay on Capitol Hill. So, instead of being in front of a packed house of say, 2,000 or so cheering research psychologists, APS Executive Director Alan Kraut presented Kennedy with the award a few weeks after the convention in the privacy of the Congressman's office, in front of a packed house of, say, three or so curious Congressional staff members. Almost the same thing, right? No?

Okay, maybe not. So, as a service to APS Members, and through the low-tech magic of the written word, we are pleased to bring you this pre-enactment (What a concept, huh?) of "What They Would Have Said: Honoring Patrick J. Kennedy at the APS Convention." Picture a raucous scene in the hotel ballroom, as Kraut extols Rep. Kennedy's virtues and the audience of APS members chants Kennedy's name over and over (and Kraut's, too, of course — or is that too much kissing up? — Ed.). Then Kennedy accepts the award and reiterates his firm commitment to continue to fight for basic behavioral research!

With the scene set, here are the remarks Kraut and Kennedy had prepared. All you need to do is imagine them being said at the Convention. (We suggest you start the chanting just after Kraut and before Kennedy.)

Honoring a Champion of Behavioral Science Research: Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy

APS Executive Director Alan G. Kraut:

Some of you know that Representative Patrick J. Kennedy is a tireless advocate for mental health. In fact, most in Washington predict that this year there finally will be successful legislation to prevent insurance discrimination against those with mental and addictive disorders. The credit will go deservedly to Patrick Kennedy.

But what you may not know is that Rep. Kennedy also is a leading supporter of the research on which those services are based. And he has been doing this in a way that truly distinguishes him as someone who genuinely understands the scientific process.

Being here in Washington, let me illustrate just how important Representative Kennedy has been to our field with a little "behind the scenes" look at Congress. Think of this as the Dance of Legislation 101.

This is a story about the National Institutes of Health, the funder of nearly \$29 billion in health research a year. And psychology and behavioral science have been supported by some of that money at many of the 27 NIH Institutes. As they should be. After all, so many of our nation's problems have behavior at their core: AIDS, lung disease, substance abuse, heart disease, violence, cancer, depression, teen pregnancy, racism, terrorism, obesity, child abuse.

The exception is NIGMS — the National Institute of General Medical Sciences — which spent \$0 for behavioral science when we started this effort.

NIGMS is known as the “basic science” institute. It's supposed to support behavior, the kind of very basic behavioral science on, say, emotion or cognition or memory or social relations that then goes on to be used for more mission-oriented research in schizophrenia or depression, for example, at the National Institute of Mental Health, or for developing new prevention strategies at the National Cancer Institute. At least, the law says NIGMS is supposed to support behavior. The problem is that it does not.

We, of course, raised this with NIGMS but didn't get very far. So we began raising this issue with Congress.

We presented testimony in front of Rep. Kennedy's Appropriations subcommittee. Rep. Kennedy asked me some pretty sophisticated questions about basic behavioral science, reflecting a clear understanding of the continuum of basic to applied research. Accompanying those questions was his well-known passion for the many health issues represented by NIH.

We continued the exchange over time, and before long, Rep. Kennedy was moving full speed ahead on the issue of basic behavioral science.

Now this has all taken place over the course of several years, as these kinds of issues often do. And after stonewalling as much as possible, NIH proposed to Rep. Kennedy that they would conduct a formal study on the role of basic behavioral science at all of NIH.

Rep. Kennedy, along with his colleague Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA), who joined him on this issue, agreed to allow NIH to do the study. But they also said that, study or no study, at the end of the day, it was going to be difficult to convince them that the National Institute of General Medical Sciences should not be following its own law.

That NIH study took place throughout 2004. And I have to say that it had an all-star Working Group overseeing it. APS's own then-president Bob Levenson was on it, as was former APS president Susan Fiske, both here tonight, along with one of tonight's other honorees, James Jackson.

Their main recommendation was for NIH to make a home for basic behavioral science at NIGMS. What a critical recommendation this was. After a year's worth of study, this distinguished group agreed that a structure for behavior needed to be created.

Now, you'd think this would do it, but astoundingly NIH never said a peep about the Working Group's recommendation. They never got back to Rep. Kennedy. They simply ignored it for many, many months.

Rep. Kennedy responded by making his thoughts in support of basic behavior absolutely clear in a speech to Congress (see the accompanying copy of the Congressional Record of the speech on page 22).

Then followed more back and forths between Congress and NIH. And more friends in Congress recently joined with Mr. Kennedy to say to NIH, "Just wait a minute, NIH. You need to think again."

So, where does this leave us? Well, this is a story that is not yet over. We don't know what the implications of this last set of back and forths between NIH and Congress will be. We don't know what this coming year of discussions within Congress will bring. And you can never predict what behind-the-scenes events will ultimately shape this.

But what we do know is at each step, we will have the strength and support of an advocate for all of us in the highest reaches of the Congress of the United States.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present this award to this national leader who fights daily for those who are helped by our research, and so, for us, as well. Please join me in conveying our gratitude to Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy.

Acceptance of the APS Award

Representative Patrick J. Kennedy:

I want to thank you for this great honor, and I want particularly to acknowledge Alan Kraut. He is a terrific advocate and tireless in promoting psychological science. And I want to thank Dr. Morton Gernsbacher and the leadership of APS for this award.

But mostly, I want to thank all of you for the work you do. You are changing people's lives.

I've traveled the country this year doing field hearings trying to build momentum to end insurance discrimination. And it's been amazing hearing people's stories of redemption.

I've heard so many powerful stories of people who lost years and decades of their lives to mental illnesses and addictions, but then got life-changing (or life-saving) treatment. Now they have families, jobs, success, and happiness.

Your science is making those life-changing treatments possible.

And it has a broader effect too. The science helps break down the insidious stereotypes and stigma that keeps so many from getting the treatment they need. You are helping Americans understand that mental illnesses are physical illnesses.

That's why I'm committed to protecting research. I know that the cuts in recent years to NIH are having devastating and long-lasting consequences to researchers. NIH is funding a record-low percentage of meritorious applications.

We need to get those NIH budgets up so we can invest in the future of our health care system. And we

particularly need to keep fighting for basic behavioral science. This is the building block upon which so much of applied health research is based.

It may not be sexy. It may not be glamorous. But it is absolutely essential.

So thank you all for your great work, for helping us work toward a world when every American, regardless of his or her diagnosis, has the chance to reach his or her God-given potential.