University of Dayton English Professor Tests the Prowess of Nation's Best Spellers; Federal Funds for Scientific Research Enter "Pork Barrel" Stage, Trend Endangers Future, Says University of Dayton Research Scientist

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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ENGLISH PROFESSOR TESTS THE PROWESS OF NATION’S BEST SPELLERS

Each spring since 1980, Alex Cameron has traveled to the nation’s capital to preside over the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, an event that has become as American as apple pie and as competitive as college basketball.

"It's worth your life to get a look at the words guarded by the pronouncer," said Cameron wryly, picking up off his desk this year's typewritten list of 1,000 words that will test the spelling prowess of more than 200 youngsters May 31-June 1.

To children who have spent months, sometimes years, memorizing words ranging from the simple "cupcake" to the tongue-twisting "phrenicectomy," the spelling bee is more than a game. Cameron sees a common trait among the winners. These children are not necessarily the best coached—they're the best read: "The ones who win may not study a lot of mechanical lists, but every single one is a highly literate kid."

Preparing for the bee is as demanding on Cameron as the competitors. He researches definitions, pronunciations, roots and homonyms, writes sample sentences, and then spends the entire month of May at his family’s home in Dearborn, Mich., where he practices pronouncing: "I put my feet up on the porch rail and make strange sounds."

For interviews, contact Alex Cameron at (513) 229-3434 or (313) 584-1333.

FEDERAL FUNDS FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ENTER "PORK-BARREL" STAGE, TREND ENDANGERS FUTURE, SAYS UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Pork-barrel funding.

A long-standing tradition in American politics has now entered the field of scientific research. According to a University of Dayton researcher, legislators have been doling out "pork-barrel" funding to universities and institutions that can't compete for merit-based research funds. The allocations now account for $300 to $400 million each year, or about one percent of the total federal funds for research.

"I can see two top dangers," said Joseph P. Martino, a senior research scientist in UD's Research Institute who recently completed a book manuscript on the problems in government-supported research, such as the trend in pork-barrel funding. "Funding that is ostensibly appropriated for research will be distributed by political rather than scientific criteria," he said. "The other danger is that top-notch scientific institutions will lose (funding) support to more political institutions."

In "Pork Invades the Lab," an article published in the March 1989 issue of "Reason" magazine, Martino recaps cases of pork-barrel funding where legislators earmark funds for specific institutions, such as their alma maters or universities in their home districts. Martino expects the trend to continue and accelerate, but decries the results: "We can't tolerate the destruction and corruption of our research enterprise. Our national defense, our health and our economic growth in a highly competitive world depend on good scientific and technological research."

For media interviews, contact Joseph Martino at (513) 229-3036.