Legislative Scorecard

Issues

Congress Recesses for Election Without Finalizing FY2011 Appropriations

Prior to adjourning on September 29 for its election recess, the Senate and House approved a Continuing Resolution which funds most government programs at the FY2010 level, as the new fiscal year begins on October 1 and Congress had not finalized any of the FY2011 spending bills. The CR expires December 3, so it is the leadership's intent to return in a lame duck session to complete appropriations. This process could extend into February 2011, however, depending on the election outcome. There is also a chance that the CR could last a full year if Congress cannot reach agreement, potentially leaving the NIH and the NEI flat-funded, resulting in a net loss when biomedical inflation is factored in.

Both the House and Senate have proposed FY2011 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) spending bills that provide for a $1 billion, or 3.2 percent, inflationary funding increase for the NIH to $32 billion (see funding chart). This was also the funding level proposed by President Obama. The House bill has not been approved by the full Appropriations Committee, so only top line details are available. The Senate bill was approved by the Appropriations Committee and details were released. It proposes NEI funding at $723.2 million, or a 2.3 percent increase. I/C increases range from 2.3 to 2.8 percent. The President’s budget had proposed a 2.5 percent NEI increase, but all I/Cs were tapped to underwrite initial funding of the Cures Acceleration Network (CAN) at $50 million. CAN, which was authorized by Congress at $500 million in healthcare reform legislation passed earlier this year [Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, P.L. 111-148], but not appropriated funds, was created to assist NIH in “crossing the Valley of Death from bench to bedside,” that is, the rapid translation of basic research into treatments. It remains unclear as to what extent the NEI and vision researchers may have access to CAN funds (see story on translational research).

The Senate bill’s Report Language highlights how NEI is meeting the five research priorities as defined by NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins—genomics, translational research, global health, research that supports healthcare reform, and efforts to reinvestigate the biomedical research enterprise. This language reflects NAEVR’s written submission.

Although the medical research advocacy community, including NAEVR, had requested FY2011 NIH funding at $35 billion, it has thanked Congressional leaders for the proposed $1 billion funding increase and their efforts to ensure that NIH funding keeps pace with biomedical inflation.

Dr. Collins Testifies Before Congress Citing Power of the “Genetic Signature”

On June 15, Dr. Collins was the sole witness at a hearing entitled NIH in the 21st Century: The Director’s Perspective held by the Subcommittee on Health of the House Energy and Commerce (E&C) Committee, which is chaired by Cong. Frank Pallone (D-NJ). The full Committee, which has authorizing jurisdiction over the NIH, spearheaded the last Congressional reauthorization of the NIH through the NIH Reform Act of 2006.

In written and oral statements, Dr. Collins provided a status report on NIH activities, including those specifically mandated in the 2006 reauthorization. Dr. Collins’ appearance before the E&C Subcommittee—his first as NIH Director—followed his April 28 and May 5 appearances in hearings held by the LHHS Subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, respectively, on FY2011 NIH funding. The issue of funding and NIH’s concomitant priority-setting process were the subject of many questions. Dr. Collins responded that it is optimal for science to drive the process with due consideration of disease burden and cost. He emphasized that NIH’s two-tiered peer review system—reflecting scientific excellence of investigator proposals balanced with NIH’s programmatic needs—has served the nation well, stating that, “it is a complex calculus that should be best done by scientists.” He acknowledged the importance of funding basic science, which is the backbone of discovery, while aggressively pursuing the translation of that research.

Dr. Collins offered numerous examples of how identifying an individual’s “genetic signature” will facilitate translation of basic research into more effective personalized medicine treatments. In that regard, he described how he was working closely with Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, M.D. through the newly formed NIH/FDA Joint Leadership Council to ensure that the latest science is integrated into the regulatory review process.

Visit the NIH/NEI funding section of NAEVR’s Web site at www.eyeresearch.org for full details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 2009 Final</th>
<th>FY 2010 Final</th>
<th>FY 2011 President’s Request</th>
<th>FY 2011 Senate</th>
<th>FY 2011 House**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NIH**</td>
<td>$303.3 B</td>
<td>+2.6%</td>
<td>$311 B + 2.3%</td>
<td>$322 B + 2.5%</td>
<td>$322 B + 2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEI</td>
<td>$688.5 M</td>
<td>+3.2%</td>
<td>$706.66 M + 2.6%</td>
<td>$724.36 M + 2.5%</td>
<td>$723.22 M + 2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*    Net of Transfers/One Time Expenses
+ President’s Budget ($707.04 M after Base April 7)
^ Senate Appropriations Committee not yet approved
# House Appropriations Committee not yet approved
6/10/06

Dr. Tabak Named NIH Principal Deputy Director

NAEVR has written to Lawrence Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D. and congratulated him on his recent appointment as NIH Principal Deputy Director. He previously served as the Director of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR).

Dr. Collins’ E&C Testimony Praises Vision Research

“Twenty years ago, we could do little to prevent or treat age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Today, because of new treatments and procedures based in part on NIH research, 1.3 million Americans at risk for severe vision loss over the next five years can receive potentially sight-saving therapies.”