

## Dingell vs. Waxman: A Battle of Titans

Only days after the 2008 congressional election, newly elected House Democrats had to cast what could be the toughest vote of their congressional careers—who to support for chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. For the soon-to-be members of Congress, supporting the wrong candidate could doom their legislative careers before they even start.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee is the oldest and most powerful



Rep. John Dingell (D-MI)



Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA)

committee in the House of Representatives. It has jurisdiction ranging from biomedical

research and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to U.S. energy policy and travel and tourism. Rep. John Dingell (D-MI) has served as the chair or senior Democrat on the Energy and Commerce Committee since 1981. As the

longest-serving member of the House, first elected in 1955, Dingell is also the Dean of the House of Representatives.

### The Challenge

In the days following the 2008 election, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) announced that he would challenge Dingell for the chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee. Waxman, first elected in 1974, currently serves as chair of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. That is the main investigative committee of the House, but it has no legislative powers.

Waxman won the battle of congressional titans 137–122. While Waxman will continue to be supportive of the NIH in his new position, he may also continue to use his investigatory skills in his new oversight role.

NIH-related issues that will confront the Waxman-led committee include reversal of the Bush policy on federally funded stem cell research, NIH reauthorization, and ongoing congressional concern about scientific conflict of interest. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

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