

## NIH Wants Quality, Not Quantity

Things are really about to change at the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). Beginning in January 2010, NIH grant applications will have to follow new guidelines.

One of the priorities of the NIH Enhancing Peer Review Initiative (see April and June 2008 *ASCB Newsletter*) was to improve the quality and transparency of the peer review process. A shorter grant application in line with review criteria was one of the goals associated with that priority.

The application changes focus on two areas: shortened page limits and alignment

of the application with review criteria. The NIH is shortening applications to reduce the administrative burden on both applicants and reviewers. To make sure that the information applicants submit in their grant application coincides with the information reviewers expect to find, the NIH is also restructuring the applications.

For detailed information about the changes to NIH grant applications, go to [http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/restructured\\_applications.html](http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/restructured_applications.html). ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

## Always Judge a Grant by Its Title?

Luckily for science, reviewing grant applications is not the responsibility of Congress.

Unfortunately, three members of the House of Representatives didn't get that memo.

In July, U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA) offered an amendment to the FY10 Departments of Labor, Health & Human Services (LHHS), and Education Appropriations bill. That bill funds the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The amendment—if approved—would prohibit the funding of three NIH grants: Substance Use and HIV Risk among Thai Women, Venue-based HIV and Alcohol Use Risk Reduction among Female Sex Workers in China, and Maximizing Opportunity—HIV Prevention in Hospitalized Russian Drinkers.

In an effort to squelch a possibly contentious debate, U.S. House Appropriations Committee chair David Obey (D-WI) allowed the amendment to be adopted by voice vote and without any debate. The amendment is expected to be removed during the House-Senate Conference on the LHHS and Education Appropriations bill.

In September, U.S. Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) and Greg Walden (R-OR) sent a letter to NIH Director Francis Collins asking for detailed

information about 12 grants. Many of the grants have provocative titles. Some titles may sound like a waste of federal funding.

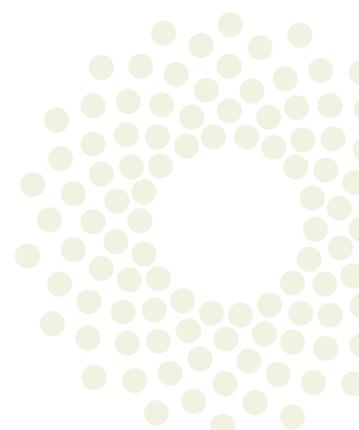
The letter from Reps. Barton and Walden highlights four grants, including three not referenced in the Issa amendment—Impact of Dragon Boat Racing on Cancer Survivorship, The Healing of the Canoe, Patterns of Drug Use and Abuse in the Brazilian Rave Culture—and Substance Use and HIV Risk among Thai Women.

For each of the 12 grants, Collins was asked to provide:

- An explanation of how the grant relates to NIH funding priorities
- The grant's overall impact score
- The number of peer reviewers who reviewed the grant
- The score each reviewer gave the grant
- The number of grants that were reviewed at the study section meeting that considered the grant

To read the letter from Reps. Barton and Walden, go to [http://republicans.energycommerce.house.gov/Media/file/News/092409\\_Barton\\_Walden\\_NIH\\_Grants.pdf](http://republicans.energycommerce.house.gov/Media/file/News/092409_Barton_Walden_NIH_Grants.pdf). ■

—Kevin M. Wilson



## Obama, Check; Sebelius, Check

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Francis Collins carries a list in his suit pocket of things he wants to accomplish in his first six months as NIH Director. On September 30, Collins was able to cross off two big items from his list when U.S. President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius visited the NIH campus.

The President and Secretary Sebelius went to the NIH to announce that the NIH had awarded more than 12,000 grants from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), totaling \$5 billion. The \$5 billion represents almost half of the \$10.4 billion the NIH received in ARRA funding.

During his remarks, Obama said the 12,000 grants represented “the single largest boost to biomedical research in history.”

The President also recognized the hard political and fiscal times the NIH has faced recently. The President said, “For decades,

the NIH has been at the forefront of medical invention and innovation, helping to save countless lives and relieve untold suffering. And yet, if we're honest, in recent years we've seen our leadership slipping as scientific integrity was at times undermined and research funding failed to keep pace.”

In his introductory remarks, Collins praised the work of the NIH staff who worked on the ARRA grants. He praised them for quickly writing RFAs, recruiting over 15,000 reviewers, and then processing the awards promptly.

When it came time to introduce the President, Collins called him to the stage “as our Scientist-in-Chief.”

After the President left the NIH, Sebelius stayed for visits to NIH labs and meetings with NIH Institute Directors.

To watch President Obama's speech at the NIH, go to <http://videocast.nih.gov/Summary.asp?File=15315>. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

## ARRA Advances Science



**Has your lab received funds from the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)?**

**If so, tell your elected officials and neighbors about how ARRA funding helps your community.**

**Go to [www.ascb.org/ARRA](http://www.ascb.org/ARRA) to tell your story.**