

ASCB Council Visits Congress

Nine members of the ASCB Council met with Members of Congress and their staff during a daylong visit to Capitol Hill on May 25, 2011. Discussions centered on the importance of U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH)- and National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded research in developing effective medical treatments and supporting local communities across the U.S.

Unlike during past visits to the Hill, Council members heard *qualified* support for the NIH and NSF. Members of Congress and their staff were generally enthusiastic about the important work done by NIH- and NSF-funded researchers. ASCB Council members were reminded, however, that the federal government is experiencing tight budgets, and both agencies

will have to participate in “belt-tightening.”

ASCB Council members Ray Deshaies, Akihiro Kusumi, Tim Mitchison, Inke Nāthke, Sandra Schmid, Elizabeth Sztul, Ron Vale, Sue Wick, and Virginia Zakian had meetings with 10 congressional offices and five Senate offices. Several members also attended a hearing by the Joint Economic Committee, titled “Driving Innovation and Job Growth through the Life Sciences Industry.” Councilors were joined by ASCB Executive Director Joan Goldberg, Coalition for the Life Sciences Director Lynn Marquis, and ASCB Director of Public Policy Kevin Wilson.

For a personal account of the day on Capitol Hill by Sandra Schmid, see page 5. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

ASCB Encourages Industry to Fight for Science

Most Members of Congress understand that researchers in their states receive U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding. What they may not understand is how important the NIH budget is to the biotech companies and manufacturers of research equipment and supplies in their states.

The ASCB Public Policy Committee has launched an effort to expand the size of the NIH advocacy community to include: (1) companies that supply labs with equipment and supplies, (2) biotech companies that benefit from basic research, and (3) the patient advocacy community whose members are the ultimate beneficiaries of members’ research.

Recent reports highlight the huge impact NIH-funded research has on the U.S. economy and on the economies of every state. One

report, prepared by the advocacy group United for Medical Research, estimates that in 2010

NIH investments led to the creation of 487,900 high-tech, high-wage jobs. Moreover, these investments produced \$68.035 billion in new economic activity around the U.S.

To help individual companies educate their elected officials about the importance to their businesses of NIH

funding, the ASCB has created a website featuring tips on how to educate Members of Congress. The website contains a draft letter companies can send to their elected officials.

The website, NIH Creates Jobs, is at www.ascb.org/NIHcreatesjobs.html. Please share the URL with your suppliers and business partners. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson



Screen shot of NIH Creates Jobs website

Report Puts NSF “Under the Microscope”

Sometimes it seems that U.S. Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) has never seen a government program he likes. Only a few months after issuing a report highlighting what he termed wasteful government spending in 2010, Senator Coburn issued a detailed report on what he considers U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) wasteful spending. This is at least the 15th such report detailing wasteful federal spending issued by Coburn’s Senate office since 2008.

The report, *The National Science Foundation: Under the Microscope*, begins by highlighting some of the significant contributions the NSF has made to scientific discovery. This includes the Internet, Cloud Computing, Buckyballs, and marketing barcodes. The report focuses on what the Senator claims is \$3 billion in waste at the NSF.

The Coburn report highlights “mismanagement” of taxpayer funds, including “poor grant administration” and “ineffective contracting” practices, “limited and ineffective program metrics,” and general wasteful spending by NSF employees. It also questions some of the grants that have been awarded by the NSF.

The report claims that \$1 billion in additional funding for NSF research could be made available immediately without any increases in the overall NSF budget if Congress were to adopt seven recommendations:

- Establish clear guidelines for what constitutes “transformative” and “potentially transformative” science
- Set clear metrics to measure success and standards to ensure accountability
- Eliminate NSF’s Social, Behavioral, and Economics Directorate
- Consolidate the Directorate for Education & Human Resources
- Return unspent or expired grant funds
- Reduce duplication among federal research agencies
- Provide additional resources to the NSF Inspector General’s office

The ASCB agrees with Senator Coburn’s strong support for the role the NSF plays in scientific research. At the start of the report, the Senator says, “the National Science Foundation (NSF) is our nation’s premier broad-based scientific research agency. NSF is the major source of federal backing in mathematics and computer sciences and spends billions more in important fields such as engineering, biology, physics, and technology.”

To read *The National Science Foundation: Under the Microscope*, go to <http://tinyurl.com/NSF-Report>. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

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