

## Congress: They Signed on the Dotted Line—But Will It Matter?

One hundred and seventy-one members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate have signed their names to letters supporting the work of the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). The question remains, however, will anyone listen?

Members of the House and Senate routinely indicate their support for programs or legislation by signing group letters to congressional leaders and committees. It is a way for individual representatives to show their support, and a way for congressional leaders to gauge support for specific legislative initiatives.

Unlike previous years when similar letters included requests for specific budget increases, the letters this year do not make specific requests for funds. Also, in past years, support for the NIH was bipartisan. Unfortunately, unified support for the NIH has fallen victim to the hyper-partisanship that has gripped Congress in recent years.

Whether congressional leadership will pay attention to the support of 171 members of Congress won't be clear until this fall.

To read the letters of support for the NIH, go to <http://tinyurl.com/FederalSupportofScience>. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

## FY12 NSF Budget: A Sign of Things to Come?

The U.S. House Appropriations Committee has produced its budget proposal for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and, while the news isn't good, it could have been much worse.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies has approved the FY12 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations (CJS) bill, which includes funding for the NSF and several other federal science agencies. While none of the agencies in the CJS bill received increases in funding, the NSF was the only agency to be funded at the FY11 level.

In remarks during the Subcommittee meeting, both the full House Appropriations Committee Chair and the Subcommittee Chair commented on the impact scientific research has on U.S. economic growth. Subcommittee Chair Frank Wolf (R-VA) said, "Despite a 6

percent lower allocation in fiscal year 2011, this bill increases funding for research accounts at NIST [National Institute of Standards and Technology] and NSF. Investments in scientific research are critical to long-term economic growth and job creation."

The flat funding for the NSF, and the recognition by U.S. House of Representatives leaders of the economic importance of federally funded scientific research, may be an indication of the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) FY12 budget.

A frozen budget is not good for any federal science program. In fact, any increase less than the annual rate of biomedical inflation (BRDPI) is, essentially, a cut. However, with Congress focused on cutting the federal budget's domestic portion, budget increases of any size are hard to come by. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson