

NIH Asked, ASCB Members Answered

The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently asked for community input into the deliberations of the Advisory Committee to the NIH Director Working Group on the Future Biomedical Research Workforce. In response to the request, the ASCB developed a survey and sent it to U.S. members for their comment.

In only two days, ASCB received hundreds of responses, including many thoughtful comments. Thanks to the survey responses, the ASCB was able to submit a detailed response to the NIH request (see page 1). ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

ASCB Asks Industry to Join the Fight for the NIH

The ASCB has a message for the companies that provide supplies and equipment to U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH)-funded research labs and the businesses that depend on NIH-funded investigators: You need to let your congressional representatives know how important NIH funding is to your business and your employees.

The ASCB has recently launched a new campaign to expand the size of the community advocating for the NIH. The ASCB hopes to involve: 1) companies that supply labs with equipment and supplies, 2) biotech companies that benefit from NIH-supported basic research, and 3) patient organizations whose members will be the ultimate beneficiaries of basic research.

So far, ASCB Public Policy Director Kevin Wilson has contacted almost 200 executives at over 140 individual companies to encourage them to become involved in advocating for the NIH. The ASCB has created a website that includes tips on how companies can educate their federal representatives about the importance to their businesses of NIH funding.

The website, NIH Creates Jobs, is at www.ascb.org/NIHCreatesJobs.html. Please share the URL with your suppliers and business partners and encourage them to speak out now on behalf of NIH funding. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

Organismal Biologist to Lead NSF BIO

An environmental endocrinologist has been selected as the new head of the U.S. National Science Foundation's (NSF) Directorate of Biological Sciences (BIO).

John C. Wingfield, who previously served as division director of Integrative Organismal Systems at the NSF, will now serve as the Assistant NSF Director for Biological Sciences. Before joining the NSF in 2010, Wingfield chaired the Department of Zoology at the University of Washington from 1999 to 2003. He has also held an Endowed Chair at the University of California, Davis, since 2007. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson



John C. Wingfield

The ASCB and the Coalition for the Life Sciences: Partners in Advocacy

How does the ASCB represent members' interests to funding agencies, Congress, and other important bodies? Who represents you and how? Last month the *ASCB Newsletter* featured an article focused on the ASCB Public Policy Committee (PPC), Project 50, and the Congressional Liaison Committee (CLC). This article specifically focuses on the Coalition for the Life Sciences (CLS), a key partner in advocating for ASCB members' interests.

The ASCB first organized a coalition of like-minded scientific societies in 1989. At that time, U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) appropriations were under threat and declining in value. At the same time, the organizations that normally advocated for biomedical research—universities and the groups representing them—were supporting higher indirect cost reimbursement rates. ASCB members knew that such expenses would come out of research grants. Alarmed by these developments, leaders from the ASCB joined with leaders of the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) and the Biophysical Society to object to the call for higher indirect cost reimbursements. Subsequently, the leaders of these societies decided that self-advocacy was imperative. Thus, the Joint Steering Committee for Public Policy (JSC) was formed. Its initial mission: to bring scientists together to advocate for federal funding for basic biomedical research.

The ASCB and JSC partnership has endured and grown for 22 years. During that time the JSC was renamed the Coalition for the Life Sciences to better reflect its focus; and the CLS has grown from three societies to six members, including ASCB, ASBMB, the American Society for Clinical Investigation, the Genetics Society of America, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and the Society for Neuroscience. In addition, the CLS mission, like that of the ASCB, has

grown from solely focusing on funding to incorporating a broader focus on policy: namely, policies that advance biological research. Uniting with one voice strengthens our position with policy leaders on Capitol Hill and at the NIH.

Why the CLS?

Many organizations in Washington, DC, serve a role similar to that of the CLS. So why does the ASCB remain such a strong partner in the CLS? Communicating with Congress and the NIH, major universities, and other institutions is an extraordinary task. Through various programs the CLS has a proven track record of actively engaging scientists with elected officials and NIH leadership.

The CLS is unique in how it brings science to Capitol Hill. The then-JSC helped Congress launch the Congressional Biomedical Research Caucus (CBRC) in 1990. The CBRC has since grown to become perhaps the most credible caucus in Congress, as well as a model for other congressional caucuses. A caucus serves a convening, organizing, and advocacy function for members of Congress who support their purpose, in this case, the importance of scientific research. Caucuses are also bipartisan, no-dues associations for congressional representatives.

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CBRC activities feature a highly successful series of briefings that brings research leaders—many of whom are ASCB members—to Capitol Hill to describe the latest advances in biomedical research.

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The explicit messages are that science is an iterative process of discovery fueled by individual investigators, and that taxpayer dollars are well spent in, often NIH's, support of this research.

The CLS brings top leaders of federal agencies and Congress together with CLS leadership to strengthen our partnerships and tackle critical issues of concern to biomedical research. The CLS has not only met with influential leaders in Congress but with representatives from President Obama's Administration, NIH, and individual Institute Directors. Administration representatives include individuals directly responsible for drafting the NIH and National Science Foundation budgets and policy that affect biomedical research. The CLS has had continued access to NIH Directors since Harold Varmus served in that role; many on the CLS Board serve in leadership positions on various NIH Councils.

The CLS serves another important role—the organization of scientific citizens for advocacy. Through its Congressional Liaison Committee (CLC), chaired by ASCB member Tom Pollard, the CLS can organize the voices and passions of individual biomedical scientists in participating member societies. In fact, the CLS offers a limited amount of travel awards to individual scientists to come to Washington, DC, and advocate for biomedical research. (For information, visit

<http://www.coalitionforlifesciences.org/be-an-advocate/capitol-hill-days>.)

The CLC also develops scientific citizens through its mail/email campaigns to elected officials. Email campaigns are easy to participate in, as the CLS drafts letters for individuals' personalization and signature. It's free to join the CLC, and CLS staff will guide you through the Washington bureaucracy. To join, visit <http://www.coalitionforlifesciences.org/be-an-advocate/cls-grassroots-advocacy/join-the-clc>.

The ASCB scientific community is fortunate that the CLS leadership includes many respected scientists, including ASCB members Keith Yamamoto (chair), Mary Beckerle, Jeremy Berg, Martin Chalfie, Jack Dixon, Gerald Fink, James Haber, H. Robert Horvitz, Richard Hynes, Elizabeth McNally, Pollard, Joan Steitz, and Janet Shaw.

Biomedical research faces many challenges in Washington, from funding to peer review, science education to stem cell research. The CLS and ASCB will continue to use their strong partnership to confront challenges to the scientific community. ■

—Lynn Marquis, Director, CLS

¹Pollard, Thomas. Remarks, "Public Policy Award Presentation," www.ascb.org, Dec. 2010.

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CLS on Capitol Hill



The Coalition for the Life Sciences hosted two Congressional Biomedical Research Caucus briefings in September. On September 7, Hannah Kinney from Harvard Medical School (left) presented a briefing on "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome: How Research Is Keeping Babies Safe." On September 21, Regina Armstrong (right) from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences presented a briefing on "Regenerative Medicine and Its Role in Improving Recovery from Traumatic Brain Injury in Military Service Members."



The Coalition for the Life Sciences sponsored a Capitol Hill Day on September 21, 2011. Capitol Hill Days are an opportunity for scientists across the U.S. to come to Washington, DC, and meet with Members of Congress. Left to right: Katherine Taylor, University of Texas Medical Branch; Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH); Nicolaus Schmandt, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine; and Ashley Purgason, University of Texas Medical Branch.