

One Small Step...

With the support of Senate Democrats, the FY13 budget for the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) emerged from an appropriations subcommittee with a slight increase, but in the full committee Democrats defeated a Republican proposal for a larger increase.

On June 12, the Senate Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee approved its version of the FY13

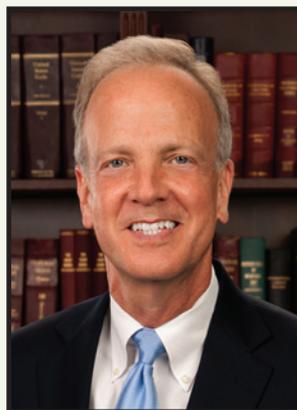
budget for the departments it oversees. That budget includes funding for the NIH.

The bill includes \$30.723 billion for the NIH, an increase of \$100 million, or 0.32%, above the FY12 NIH budget. While this increase is slight, it is, at least, an increase.

The bill was approved by a vote of 10 to 7, with all Democrats on the panel voting for the bill and all Republicans opposing the bill. Republican opposition centered on the portions of the bill that fund the Affordable Care Act, sometimes referred to as ObamaCare.

Senate Democrats Vote Against NIH Funding Increase

Later that week, the full Senate Appropriations Committee met and approved the work of the subcommittee. Before approving the funding bill, however, the committee rejected, on an essentially party line vote, an amendment by Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) that would have increased the NIH FY13 budget by \$1.2 billion to \$32 billion. All 16 Democrats on the committee voted against the funding increase for the NIH. The ASCB strongly supports an



U.S. Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS)

increase for the NIH to \$32 billion in FY13.

The Moran amendment would have increased the funding for the NIH by reducing funding for all other programs in the bill. In his remarks, Senator Moran said that the NIH was “such an important priority” that it warranted the cuts to other vital programs within the bill. In particular, Moran said that “flat funding discourages the next generation” of scientists from even entering the field of research.

During committee debate on the Moran amendment, long-time NIH supporter Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) said the 0.32% increase included in the FY13 appropriations bill is “enough” for NIH basic research. In opposing the amendment, Harkin reminded his Appropriations Committee colleagues that the name of the NIH is the National Institutes of Health, not the National Institutes of Basic Research.

In arguing for his amendment, Senator Moran made the point that the cuts to other individual programs in the bill, including education, job training, and health programs, would be minor. Those opposing the amendment also opposed setting a precedent of funding one program through across-the-board cuts to other programs.

As of press time, the House of Representatives’ Appropriations Committee had yet to approve its version of the Departments of Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education funding bill. Once the Senate and House each passes its own version of the funding bill, expect everything to stop until after the election. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

Got Questions?

Labby has answers. ASCB’s popular columnist will select career-related questions for publication and thoughtful response in the *ASCB Newsletter*. Confidentiality guaranteed if requested. Write us at labby@ascb.org. ■

ASCB Council Meets with Congress

Eight members of the ASCB Council and three ASCB postdoc members spent June 7, 2012, on Capitol Hill meeting with Senators, members of Congress, and their staffs. ASCB Council members Sue Biggins, Don Cleveland, Ray Deshaies, Kathy Green, Mark Peifer, JoAnn Trejo, Ron Vale, and Yixian Zheng were joined by postdocs Charles Easley, Audrey Howell, and Jason MacGurn.



Sue Biggins, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Yixian Zheng.

The ASCB members had 19 meetings throughout the day with congressional offices representing California, Illinois, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Along with meeting with congressional staff, ASCB members also met with Representative Brian Bilbray (R-CA), Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), and

Representative Tim Murphy (R-PA). ASCB members were joined by ASCB Accounting Assistant Stella Bermejo, ASCB Senior Director of Finance & Administration Cynthia Godes, Coalition for the Life Sciences Director Lynn Marquis, and ASCB Director of Public Policy Kevin Wilson.

As they have done in the past, the ASCB members told Congress about the important role basic research plays in the development of treatments and cures for

disease. At the same time, research funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation has a considerable economic impact on the United States. In their meetings, Council members heard strong support for increasing funding for the NIH within the confines of a shrinking federal budget. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

NIH Working Group, continued from page 1

With these facts in mind, the Working Group made several recommendations for changes to graduate training programs. These recommendations include:

- Institutions should develop training programs for nonacademic positions.
- Institutions should be encouraged to develop other degree programs for those who are interested in science but not in life at the bench.
- The NIH should cap the number of years a graduate student can be supported by NIH funds. The report recommends an institutional average of five years and an individual limit of six years of NIH support.
- The number of graduate students supported by training grants should be increased relative to the number supported by Research Project Grants (RPGs).

Despite a lack of data on the number and length of training of postdoctoral researchers in the United States, the Working Group felt that the postdoc experience should be considered an extension of the training period. For that and other reasons the Working Group's proposals for postdoctoral researchers include:

- The NIH should increase the proportion of postdocs supported by training grants and fellowships and reduce the number supported by RPGs.
- Stipends for the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (NRSA) should start at \$42,000 and then be indexed for inflation.

- NRSA stipend levels should increase with each year of the postdoctoral experience by 4% for the second and third years and 6% for years four through seven.
- The NIH should adjust its policies and require that institutional policies be adjusted to require that postdocs receive employment-related benefits that are comparable to other institution employees.
- NIH should double the number of Pathways to Independence awards, which provide up to five years of support for postdocs.

The Working Group Report also addresses other areas, including possible use of staff scientists and a reduction in “soft money” positions. In the report, the Working Group said, “The growth in ‘soft money’ positions in academic medical schools, in which investigators are required to raise 100% of their salaries and research funds, has contributed to the negative views of a career in biomedical science, and has had the additional consequence of encouraging institutions to expand their physical space without making additional long term commitments to faculty.”

To read the complete Biomedical Research Workforce Working Group report or review additional data go to <http://acd.od.nih.gov/bwf.htm>. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson