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the Life Sciences
from Molecule to
Organism*

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The American Physiological Society

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September 4, 2009

Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
Building 1
1 Center Drive
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Dr. Collins,

On behalf of the American Physiological Society (APS), I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Your vision and leadership will enable the agency to continue its distinguished history as the nation's premier biomedical research institution.

The APS is a professional society dedicated to research, education and the dissemination of scientific knowledge on how the organs and systems of the body work and interact. It was founded in 1887 and today it has nearly 10,000 members. Our members conduct research and teach students at colleges, universities, medical schools, and other public and private research institutions across the U.S.

As you noted in your address to the NIH staff on your first day in office, it is the creativity of the individual investigator that has led NIH to the success it has enjoyed. Investigator-initiated research has been the major driving force behind the scientific breakthroughs that have contributed so much to the improvement in the health and quality of life of US citizens over the past few decades. We believe that maintaining a sufficient pool of funds for the research of individual investigators is critical to the agency's ability to take full advantage of emerging scientific opportunities. Consequently, as you consider future budget decisions we urge you to prioritize funding for investigator-initiated research programs.

Investigator initiated grants also play a critical role in the training and development of future generations of scientists; for example, the majority of biomedical science graduate students are supported by R01 grants. Fostering the development of the next generation of researchers, including emphasis on gender and ethnic diversity, is another area of great concern to the APS, and we hope that the NIH will increase its commitment to support of training at all levels, including undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral fellowship. The APS is supportive of recent NIH peer review policy changes designed to enhance opportunities for New and Early Stage Investigators, and we look forward to learning more about how those programs are improving early career progression.

One of the major challenges that the NIH has faced in recent years is the inconsistency of the yearly budget allocation it receives from Congress, and this will continue to be a

challenge for the agency as the funds associated with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 expire at the end of FY 2010. As we are sure you know, cycles of increased followed by flat or decreased funding destabilize research programs and discourage new investigators from entering the field. We hope that as you advocate for the interests of NIH that you will continue to emphasize the importance of predictable, sustainable yearly budget increases. A more predictable budget growth pattern would significantly enhance the ability of NIH to sustain and grow the biomedical research enterprise.

We would very much like to meet with you to discuss your funding priorities and our common goals. Since our regularly scheduled Fall Council meeting is in Bethesda November 5-6, we hope it would be possible to meet with you on the afternoon of Wednesday November 4, 2009. If you are available then, please have your staff contact Rebecca Osthus at the APS (email: rosthus@the-aps.org, phone: 301-634-7254) to make arrangements.

We look forward to working with you in the future toward our shared goals of scientific progress and continued success for the NIH.

Sincerely,



Gary Sieck, Ph.D.
President
American Physiological Society



Irving Zucker, Ph.D.
Past President
American Physiological Society



Peter Wagner, M.D.
President-elect
American Physiological Society