

Written Testimony on behalf of the American Physiological Society

Witness:

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Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify about the NIH budget on behalf of the American Physiological Society. My name is Dr. Hannah Carey, and I am a Professor at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine and currently the President-Elect of the APS.

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. It was founded in 1887 and today it has more than 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. There are 185 APS members in Wisconsin and 522 in New York.

On behalf of the scientific community, I would like to thank you for the strong support that Congress has given the NIH. We know that Congress understands the importance of biomedical research and we appreciate that. The doubling of the NIH budget enabled the agency to expand its efforts to address important challenges in biomedical science; challenges that we need to surmount in order to solve our nation's pressing health problems. Increased research funding has allowed researchers to explore scientific opportunities on an unprecedented scale and also made it possible to train the next generation of scientists.

The problem is that since the doubling of the NIH budget was completed, the agency's funding has not kept pace with the rate of inflation. The erosion of its purchasing power has forced NIH to make tough choices. At the present time, NIH is able to fund less than 1 out of every 5 grant applications it receives. This means that top-tier research is not being funded, and that has repercussions. Not only are some of the best ideas being left unexplored, but we are also sending a very negative signal to our most talented and creative scientists, including the scientific leaders of the future.

The APS joins the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and the Ad Hoc group for medical research in urging Congress to help NIH "get back on track." We support a 6.7% increase for the NIH in FY 2008. This recommendation is based upon what is needed to bring the NIH budget to the level it would have been at in 2010 if the agency had been keeping up with inflation since the end of the doubling in FY 2003.

Our nation faces many challenges, but we believe that a compelling case can be made for building upon our investment in NIH-funded research. Research has enabled great strides in the treatment of diseases that affect people around the world, such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cancer, but much more work remains to be done. Learning more about the underlying mechanisms of disease will show us how to identify disease processes and intervene at the earliest stages, before symptoms begin to decrease a patient's quality of life and increase the cost of medical care.

NIH is the principle source of funding for most physiology research, which investigates the most basic biological mechanisms of life. Years of research into the molecular components of biological systems have provided the raw materials for understanding the functions of cells, tissues, organ systems, whole organisms and even populations. However, despite tremendous gains in biomedical research there remains a need to integrate the findings of molecular biology with organisms in all of their physiological complexity. Doing so will lead to a better understanding of human health and disease, and facilitate the development of new treatments and prevention strategies. The scientific community is poised to move forward into these exciting new areas of research, but doing so will require continued support of investigator-initiated research programs at the NIH.

We at the APS would also like to stress the importance of NIH-funded training programs for the next generation of scientists. NIH not only provides direct support to students through training grants made to institutions across the country, but also through the support of programs such as those at APS. Our education programs strive to improve science education at all levels and create a diverse scientific workforce by providing opportunities for minorities to become involved in research activities.

In closing, I thank you again for this opportunity to share the views of the APS with this subcommittee. If there is any further information that we can offer, we would be happy to do so.