

NIH to Create New Center for Translational Science; Dissolve NCRR

NIH has been working to implement a December 2010 recommendation from its Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB) to create a new National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). The SMRB approved this recommendation made by its Translational Medicine and Therapeutics (TMAT) Working Group on December 7 by a vote of 12-1. Jeremy Berg, Ph.D., the outgoing director of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS), cast the lone dissenting vote.

The TMAT Working Group's recommendation evolved from its charge to 1) "[identify] the attributes and functional capabilities of an effective translational medicine program for advancing therapeutics development; and, 2) Broadly [assess], from a high-level view, the NIH landscape for extant programs, networks, and centers for inclusion in this program and recommending their optimal organization." The Working Group was also tasked with determining how to implement the newly authorized (though as yet unfunded) Cures Acceleration Network.

A key and initially highly controversial component of the TMAT/SMRB recommendation is its proposal to transfer a number of major programs, including the Clinical and Translational Science Award Program, from the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) to NCATS. This move would result in the dissolution of NCRR and require the transfer of NCRR's remaining programs to other NIH institutes or centers.

The TMAT Working Group's proposal was first revealed in November, leaving the scientific community less than one month to comment prior to the SMRB's December 7 vote. FASEB President William Talman, speaking on behalf of the FASEB member societies, expressed concern about the speed of the process. See Dr. Talman's comments at faseb.org > news room > FASEB Comments on NIH Proposal to Create New Translational Research Center.

Following the meeting, NIH Director Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D., established a task force to help resolve the many remaining issues regarding the dissolution of NCRR. The NIH NCRR task force, which is being led by NIH Principal Deputy Director Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., Ph.D., and National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Director Alan E. Guttmacher, M.D., has held numerous public teleconferences and solicited community comments in an effort to quell the concerns that have arisen among NCRR staff and extramural researchers who utilize existing NCRR resources or programs. The task force has thus far released two "straw models" proposing new homes for NCRR programs and is receiving public comment via conference call and blog. Each of the straw models can be viewed at <http://feedback.nih.gov/index.php/category/ncats/>

NIH has also established a working group to clarify the role of the proposed NCATS. Co-chaired by Thomas Insel, M.D., Director of National Institute of Mental Health and Eric Green, M.D., Ph.D., Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, the Working Group has held numerous meetings to solicit input on the proposed center's role and activities.

AAI members who wish to submit comments to NIH on its plans for NCRR or NCATS may do so at <http://feedback.nih.gov>.

AAI 2010 Public Service Award Given to Congressman David Obey

On December 1, 2010, AAI presented retiring Congressman David Obey (D-7th, WI) with its 2010 Public Service Award (PSA) for his "extraordinary support for biomedical research through the National Institutes of Health."

During a meeting in his office in the Capitol building, Representative Obey received the award from AAI Vice President Leslie Berg, AAI Committee on Public Affairs Chair John Schreiber, AAI Director of Public Policy and Government Affairs Lauren Gross, and AAI Legislative Aide Jake Schumacher.



Chairman David Obey (D-7th, WI) accepting the AAI Public Service Award. Also pictured (L-R): Jake Schumacher, Lauren Gross, Leslie Berg, John Schreiber

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Representative Obey first entered the House in 1971, becoming — at age 30 — the youngest member of Congress, and was subsequently re-elected to twenty consecutive terms in office. In 1995, he took over as Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee and its Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee). In 2007, Representative Obey became Chair of both the full committee and its Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee.

An ardent supporter of NIH and biomedical research throughout his 41-year career in Congress, Representative Obey helped increase the NIH budget from \$1.8 billion in 1973 to more than \$31 billion today. He played a key role in securing \$10.4 billion in stimulus funds for NIH through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). He also staunchly defended the NIH peer review system, citing the danger of politicizing NIH research.

The AAI PSA is bestowed, usually annually, on “individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the advocacy and support of basic biomedical and immunologic research” and who have “distinguished themselves in such diverse fields as public affairs and policymaking, journalism and scientific writing, scientific research, research administration, minority recruitment and education in the sciences, and disease research advocacy.” Congressman Obey is the 19th individual or organization to receive the PSA since the program began in 1994.

To learn more about the AAI PSA or to see a list of previous winners, please visit www.aai.org/committees/public/2007_site/Pages/psa.htm.

A Look at the 112th Congress: What It Could Mean for Science

On January 5, 2011, the 112th Congress convened with a significantly different look. Republicans had obtained control of the House of Representatives after picking up 63 seats in the November midterm elections that yielded the biggest partisan shift since 1948. Democrats continue to hold a majority in the Senate though their majority was narrowed to a slimmer 53–47 when Republicans gained six seats.

The biomedical research community is now forced to persevere without several of its strongest champions. Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA.), a 2001 AAI Public Service awardee and key architect of both the NIH budget doubling and recent infusion of \$10 billion in stimulus (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds for NIH, lost his bid for re-election.

Representative David Obey (D-7th, WI), winner of the 2010 AAI Public Service Award, retired from the House after serving for 41 years. A longtime advocate of biomedical research, Obey used his power as Chair of the House Appropriations Committee and its Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies to increase funding for NIH.

Although it is still early in the new Congress, the Republican House Majority has already acted on promises made before the 2010 election. Its “Pledge for America” calls for a cut in nondefense discretionary spending (including NIH and other science agency funding) to fiscal year 2008 levels. (See *NIH Flat-Funded* on page 5.) Such a cut, if enacted into law, could be disastrous. The *New York Times* reported that “[an analysis by the American Association for the Advancement of Science looked at what would happen if [NIH]...were cut to the 2008 amounts. [NIH]...would lose \$2.9 billion, or 9 percent, of its research money.”

To see the New York Times article, please visit www.nytimes.com/2010/11/04/business/04research.html?_r=3.

NIH Grant Submission Changes Implemented

As previously reported, NIH made a number of changes to its grant submission policies, effective January 25, 2011. The changes include:

- **elimination of the error-correction window:** NIH closed the error-correction window which allowed researchers to correct errors or address warnings identified by NIH for two days after the submission deadline. NIH has preserved the two-day application viewing window, which permits an NIH Signing Official to reject an application with errors, allowing the applicant to correct the errors and resubmit the application.

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