

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

AAAS Government Relations helps to ensure that the science community is heard in government deliberations on such essential topics as federal funding for basic scientific research, the value of innovation as an economic stimulus, and the importance of science in everyday activities ranging from disease monitoring to certifying the safety of aircraft. At Capitol Hill briefings, AAAS regularly arranges for lawmakers to receive evidence-based science and technology updates important to a rational process of government.

U.S. R&D BUDGET: POLICY & ADVOCACY

Objective, authoritative analysis from AAAS in 2013 revealed how science-related work can be seriously damaged by sweeping federal budget cuts and a government shutdown. Such damage could have long-range effects, AAAS emphasized, affecting innovation and the future economic health of the nation.

At one public briefing on Capitol Hill, as an example, the director of the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program said that total federal spending on scientific research and development would drop by 6.5% or \$9.3 billion for 2013, according to AAAS analysis of appropriations and agency budget documents. “Most agency budgets are going to be set back at least a few years,” said Matt Hourihan. “Many of them are going to be set back a decade or more.”

“Since science is the seed corn for

economic growth, for innovation, and the seed corn for the future solution to so many of the nation’s problems, let us be careful lest we do irreversible damage,” said Alan I. Leshner, CEO of AAAS and executive publisher of the journal *Science*.

Leshner also testified in October 2013 before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation about the blow dealt to the U.S. scientific enterprise by the government shutdown at a time when budgets had already been slashed. Describing the effects of the shutdown on such agencies as the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center, Leshner related that, at that time, very few new patients were being accepted, meaning there would be a lack of care for the 200 critically ill patients per week, including 30 children, who would typically register for clinical trials. Citing many other instances in which crucial, and in some cases life-saving, services were being suspended, Leshner called on policymakers to “ensure sustained and robust support for scientific research.”

SPEAKING UP FOR SCIENCE

In February 2013, Joanne Carney, director of AAAS Government Relations, and Erin Heath, associate director, teamed up with colleagues in AAAS MemberCentral to launch the Speak Up for Science petition. Gathering more than 16,000 signatures, plus poignant comments from researchers and others about the irreversible destruction wrought by deep cuts to science-related federal funding, AAAS delivered a strong message to Capitol Hill.

Matt Hourihan, director of the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program, spoke at a 26 April 2013 public briefing on Capitol Hill about federal investment in scientific research dipping to historic lows.



“Almost every national priority—from health and defense, agriculture and conservation, to hazards and natural disasters—relies on science and engineering,” the petition told lawmakers. “Support for science is support for economic growth, innovation, and technological progress ... consider this as you seek to address our nation’s pressing fiscal challenges.”

As another example of how AAAS speaks up for science, the association in 2013 led other U.S. science, engineering, and higher education organizations to emphasize the importance of social and behavioral sciences. An inter-organizational letter to the chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, sent in response to threats to the National Science Foundation activities, cautioned that “targeting specific grants or eliminating entire sets of disciplines would produce a chilling effect across the scientific community that inhibits scientific progress and our ability to tackle societal challenges.”

BRAIN BRIEFINGS ON CAPITOL HILL

The AAAS Office of Government Relations helped convey important public-health information to lawmakers and others who attended a Capitol Hill briefing in 2013 on the subject of stroke, the third leading cause of death in the world and an age-related medical event that will become even more common as Baby Boomers age.

At the event hosted by AAAS and Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-Pennsylvania), the deputy director of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, Walter Koroshetz, explained the threat posed by stroke, as well as some of the latest research on prevention and recovery.

Koroshetz told the participants attending the briefing, which was sponsored by the Dana Foundation, that up to 70% of strokes are preventable. “If we achieve optimal weight control, physical exercise, blood pressure, and diet earlier in life, then the health benefits to individuals, their families, and to the country as a whole would be enormous.”

Intensifying physical and rehabilitative therapy after a stroke has shown great promise in studies, said Koroshetz. New technologies, such as a robot arm that could operate according to the neuronal signals of the stroke



The Golden Goose Awards.

victim in a brain-machine interface, could also provide significantly improved recovery, he said.

The stroke briefing was one of three such sessions AAAS Government Relations offered on the topic of the brain in 2013 with Dana Foundation support. The other two briefings focused on the latest advances in mapping the brain, and violence, stress, and child development.

GOLDEN GOOSE AWARDS: SUPPORTING BASIC SCIENCE

If medical researcher and practicing physician John Eng had not chosen to engage in what sounds like obscure research—studying the poisonous venom of the Gila monster—millions of diabetics would be without a drug that protects them from blindness, kidney failure, and nerve damage.

Eng and five other researchers won Golden Goose Awards in 2013, the second year that the awards were given. The brainchild of Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tennessee), the awards were created by a coalition of organizations that advocate federally funded, basic scientific research as the cornerstone of American innovation, economic growth, health, global competitiveness, and national security.

All six of the awards went to researchers, including two Nobel Prize winners, whose seemingly odd or obscure federally funded research turned out to be invaluable to society. The awards ceremony took place on Capitol Hill, and a bipartisan group of lawmakers dispensed the honors.

“The unexpected benefits of basic research have been substantial, a point well-demonstrated by the work of this year’s Golden Goose awardees,” said AAAS CEO Leshner.