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Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

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Funding Crisis Threatens Progress in Medical Research

The NIH budget is insufficient to fund all of the research that needs to be done. At present, less than one in five projects can be supported. This discouraging situation will become more distressing when the resources from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act are exhausted. Analyses of data from the NIH web site released March 3, 2011 by FASEB demonstrate how difficult times have become:

- Over the past six years, the number of research project grants funded by NIH has declined in almost every year, and we now fund 2,000 fewer grants than in FY2004
- NIH made 9,455 competing (new and renewed) awards in FY2010, 1,000 fewer than in FY2003
- Success rates have fallen more than 10 percentage points in the past decade
- Success rates for new (type 1) applications have fallen for three straight years and are now at 17%

As dire as conditions are, proposed cuts to the NIH budget in H.R. 1 will make the situation much worse. This legislation proposes to cut \$1.6 billion from the FY2010 level, a loss of five percent. Adjusting for cost increases in medical research, the loss is actually \$2.5 billion, nearly eight percent. If this happens, life-saving research will be curtailed. Important discoveries will be delayed, our international competitors will gain on us, and investments of time, talent, and resources by companies, research institutions, and young scientists will be discouraged.

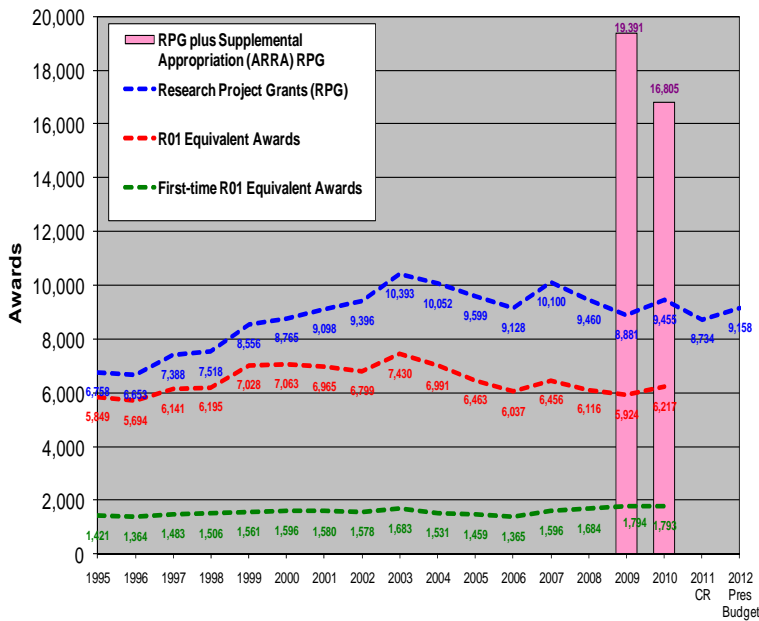
If they are implemented, the effect of the cuts will be far more damaging than the percentage losses in dollars that are currently being discussed. Most research projects are funded for four years at a time, and in any given year 75-80% of the NIH budget for research project grants is already committed to these on-going efforts. In FY 2010, for example, \$11.9 billion (75.3%) went for continuations of existing grants while \$3.9 billion (24.7%) was available for funding competing awards.

We do not know exactly how NIH would allocate a cut of \$1.6 billion. Competing grants might be more vulnerable than on-going commitments and existing projects. A loss of \$1.6 billion (or a substantial fraction of this amount) from the \$3.9 billion dollar budget for competing awards would drastically curtail the ability to fund new awards, and the impact would be far greater than five to eight percent. Moreover, since the fiscal year is nearly half over and a large portion of the spending decisions already made, the cuts would need to be made at an accelerated rate for awards under consideration. Years of research and planning could be wiped out.

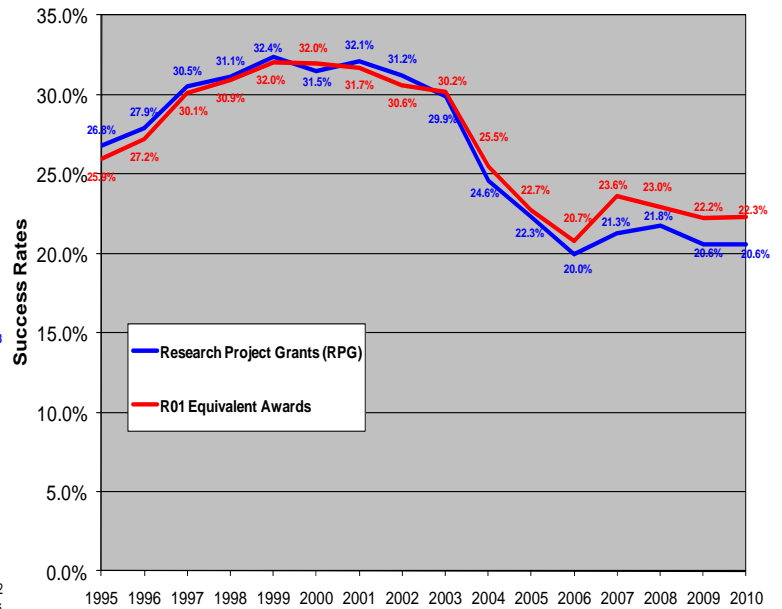
Due to the extreme competition for support, NIH grant applicants have pared their funding request to the bare minimum needed to conduct the work. Even then, many awards are made for less than the requested amount. If NIH chose to spread the pain across all grants (competing and continuing), then carefully constructed research plans will not receive sufficient funding to get the work done.

A small fraction of our federal budget, research funding generates an enormous return in new technologies and improved quality of life. Boom and bust cycles are wasteful and inefficient strategies for funding science. Sustained, predictable growth in funding for research will maximize the return on this investment in our nation's future. We must not let partisan bickering jeopardize an historic opportunity for progress and imperil the health and well being of our children.

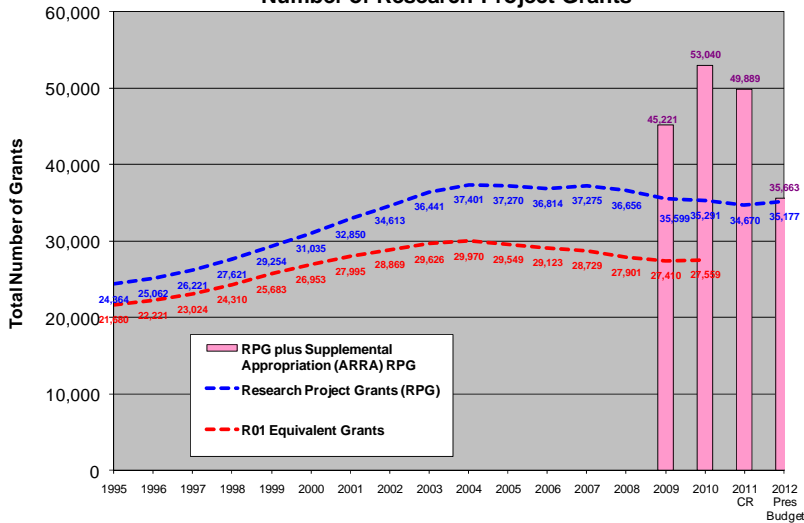
Number of Competing Awards (With Breakout of First-time R01)



Success Rates (Excluding ARRA)



Number of Research Project Grants



Success Rates for New (Type 1) Applications, Including First-time R01 Award

