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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Committee on Appropriations

Washington, DC 20515-6015

August 13, 2004

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Dear:

We all want to pass the FY2005 Labor/HHS/Education/Related Agencies Appropriations Bill in a timely fashion, and we are writing about one particular way in which you can help us do so.

Last year when the House considered the FY2004 Labor/Health and Human Services/Education/Related Agencies Appropriations bill, amendments were brought to the floor that would have de-funded specific research grants awarded by the National Institutes of Health, an agency which rightly engenders broad bipartisan support. Because we were not apprised of these amendments in a timely fashion beforehand, we were not in a position to provide answers to the detailed questions that were raised about the grants.

During Appropriations Committee hearings this year, NIH Director Elias Zerhouni provided information to Congress about the grants in question and provided assurances that the grants are an important component of the Federal Government's efforts to better understand and prevent serious diseases. He first noted that the Public Health Service Act requires that NIH conduct and support "research, investigations, experiments, demonstrations, and studies relating to the causes, diagnosis, treatment, control, and prevention of physical and mental diseases and impairments of man." Following a thorough evaluation, he concluded: "I believe that the peer review process, which is fundamental to the ability of NIH to conduct effective and high quality research, has worked properly and provided a level of valuable and independent review" regarding these grants. In addition, Dr. Zerhouni has also taken steps to ensure that information about NIH research is more clearly presented to the public to ensure that the relevance of particular research projects to all aspects of public health is better understood.

If you have questions about any current NIH grants, we urge you to contact Dr. Zerhouni, who would be pleased to discuss them with you. We encourage you to seek answers to your questions through the Committee and NIH, rather than surprise us on the floor of the House with amendments pertaining to particular NIH grants, at which time it will not be possible to provide detailed information about any specific grant.


As Chairman of the full Committee, I think Chairman Regula's remarks on the floor during last year's debate perfectly capture our concerns. He said: "I strongly urge the Members to resist the temptation to select a few grants for de-funding because they do not like the sound of them based on one paragraph out of what probably was a number of pages of information. It would set a dangerous precedent and put a chill on medical research if we start to micromanage individual NIH grants."

We look forward to passing a Labor/HHS/Education bill of which we can all be proud, and doing so in a manner befitting the respect and courtesies that allow the House of Representatives to function effectively.

With best wishes and personal regards, we are

Very truly yours,


C.W. Bill Young
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations


Ralph Regula
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education and Related Agencies