FASEB Organizes Meeting Between Nobel Laureates and Vice-President Cheney, Key Administration Officials

In an effort to focus the attention of the nation’s leaders on biomedical research, FASEB President Bob Wells organized and led a delegation of Nobel Laureates in a series of meetings at the White House. Lending their scientific prestige to research advocacy, the following four Nobel Laureates joined with Wells on November 20, 2003: Sidney Altman, Ph.D., 1989 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Yale University; Thomas R. Cech, Ph.D., 1989 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Howard Hughes Medical Institute; Alfred G. Gilman, M.D., Ph.D., 1994 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, UT Southwestern; and F. Sherwood Rowland, Ph.D., 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, UC Irvine. In addition, former Representative Bob Michel from the Campaign for Medical Research participated in the meetings. In preparation, the scientists convened on the evening of November 19th for a message development session organized by Bradie Metheny, founder of the Washington Fax, and heard from Roll Call Editor, Morton Kondrake, a long-time champion of biomedical research and NIH.

On November 20th, the FASEB Nobel Laureate Delegation met with Vice President Dick Cheney; Office of Management and Budget Director Josh Bolten; Jack Marburger, Ph.D., Presidential Science Advisor; and Harriet Miers, Deputy Chief of Staff for Domestic Policy. In their meetings, the Laureates thanked Administration officials for their bold vision in doubling the NIH budget and outlined the many benefits of this legacy. However, they warned of the serious consequences of failing to maintain that commitment, including risking the financial health of universities and medical schools, the health and well being of American people, the synergy between public and private sector investments, the discovery of cures for disease, and the potential loss of young investigators. In addition, the scientists spelled out the many frontiers of discovery that additional investment in NIH could help to garner for the United States.

Sensing the opportunity to educate, Wells and the Nobel Laureates also explained how NIH worked. They noted that the vast majority of the NIH budget funds extramural research, and they pointed out that the nation’s overall investment in research is only three percent of all health care dollars. The Laureates also talked about the U.S. commitment to biomedical research from a global perspective, noting

FASEB Releases its FY 2005 Funding Recommendations for NIH, Five Other Federal Agencies

On Jan. 22, 2004, FASEB released its annual report to Congress, Federal Funding for Biomedical and Related Life Sciences Research, FY 2005. In it, the Federation urges lawmakers to provide the National Institutes of Health (NIH) with an appropriation of $30.6 billion for FY 2005, a 10 percent budget increase above the level specified in the FY 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Act (H.R. 2673). This recommendation for NIH – along with recommendations for five other federal agencies that support basic biomedical or life sciences research – grew out of an effort of working scientists representing FASEB member societies.

As stated in the report’s Executive Summary, “our nation’s investment in scientific research has led to revolutionary understanding of how our bodies function at the most fundamental levels of molecules and cells. This understanding has helped us both to detect abnormalities at early stages when cures are still possible and to develop the tools to effect those cures. Federal funding has led to targeted therapies for cancers that previously portended certain death. We can now look forward to multiplying these therapies so that other types of cancer can be treated without...”

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decimating healthy cells. The federal investment has generated immeasurable rewards of healthier and longer lives for many, but not yet for all. Some of the most devastating diseases, such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s, continue to afflict millions of people and promise to ravage our increasingly aging population further. Threats to our nation’s security have heightened our focus on emerging infectious diseases and on protecting our food supply. Much has been accomplished, yet much more work is to be done. Profound advances await our discovery.” The FY 2005 funding recommendations for the other agencies include:

National Science Foundation (NSF)
- FASEB recommends an appropriation of $6.390 billion for NSF in FY 2005, an amount consistent with efforts to double NSF’s budget by 2008.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- FASEB recommends an appropriation of $6.390 billion for FY 2005, an amount consistent with efforts to double NSF’s budget by 2008.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
- FASEB recommends an appropriation of $990 million for FY 2005 for the Office of Biological and Physical Research.

Department of Energy (DOE)
- FASEB recommends an appropriation of $990 million for FY 2005 for the Office of Biological and Physical Research.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- FASEB recommends funding the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program at the $200 million level recommended in the President’s FY 2004 budget.

- FASEB recommends an appropriation of $460 million be appropriated in FY 2005 for VA biomedical research.

The report, Federal Funding for Biomedical and Related Life Sciences Research, FY 2005, will be distributed to federal lawmakers, health-research officials in the administration, and the research community. In addition, it will serve as the basis for FASEB’s research funding advocacy efforts for the next fiscal year. The report is available on the Web at http://www.faseb.org/opar/fund2005/fedfund05.pdf.

Nobel Laureates  Continued from page 1
the ongoing competition from China, Germany, France, Japan, and Sweden. Lastly, they brought up other issues that affect the overall science community, including visa restrictions and the need for increased funding for the physical sciences and other fields outside biology.

These meetings were very successful in elevating the Administration’s awareness of the importance of increased funding for biomedical research. The Laureates received a good reception in all of the meetings and were impressed by the thoughtful questions raised by the Administration officials. FASEB hopes to organize similar efforts of this nature in the future.
FY 2004 Funding Cycle Finally Complete

Funding for the majority of agencies that support biomedical research is finally official with the January 22nd completion of Senate action on the conference report accompanying H.R. 2673, the Consolidated Appropriations Bill. The House of Representatives passed the legislation – which covers funding for the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce-Justice-State, District of Columbia, Foreign Operations, Labor-Health and Human Services-Education, Transportation-Treasury, Veterans Affairs-Housing and Urban Development – on December 8, 2003. The following chart shows the funding levels for the agencies that fund biomedical research in the newly renewed Public Law 108-199, with accompanying Conference Report, HR rpt 108-401.

In an effort to move action forward on the funding bill when it was stalled in the Senate, FASEB President Robert Wells sent a letter to all members of the Senate urging them to vote for the passage of H.R. 2673. The December 5th letter noted that the “substantial investment in medical research will be severely compromised unless Congress passes the conference report…”

While recognizing that the bill is not perfect, Wells noted that “even with its limitations [it] is better than no appropriations bill at all. If NIH is forced to operate under a continuing resolution, medical research programs will have to operate at the FY 2003 level. NIH would lose $1 billion in new research funds, and this would slow progress toward cures for Parkinson’s, breast cancer, heart disease, and other causes of death and disability.”

In addition, FASEB was one of 187 organizations that signed onto a January 16th community-wide letter to the entire Senate calling for the adoption of the conference report accompanying the FY 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Bill. In this letter, FASEB and its associates emphasized what would be at stake without the passage of the legislation: $1 billion for life-saving research to find ways to cure and prevent disease; the quest for more effective diagnostic tools and treatments; and American’s standing in the biotechnology and pharmaceutical marketplace. For a complete list of the 187 organizations that signed onto the letter, go to the FASEB website at http://www.faseb.org/opa/news/docs/lt_1x16x4.pdf.

FASEB Supports Increased Benefits to Kirschstein-NRSA Postdocs

In a January 8th letter addressed to NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, FASEB President Robert Wells expressed concern over current program guidelines and stipulations that lead to significant disadvantages to Kirschstein-NRSA postdoctoral fellows and trainees. In this letter, Wells praised the Kirschstein-NRSA program for its rigorous selection of talented young researchers and for providing them with a rich training experience. Wells said, “the Kirschstein-NRSA institutional training grants and individual fellowships are the model and standard for postdoctoral research training in the United States.”

While NIH has shown support of Kirschstein-NRSA postdoctoral fellows and trainees by recently committing to increase their stipends to a target entry level of $45,000, FASEB remains concerned by the fellows’ ambiguous employment designation and the resulting lack of benefits. Kirschstein-NRSA fellows, not classified as employees, are typically denied access to benefits programs that are available to postdoctoral fellows who, while at the same institution, are funded through other sources. Wells maintains, “[t]hese benefits are particularly critical to postdoctoral fellows whose median age is advancing and particularly to those who have family responsibilities.”

FASEB contends that the discrepancy in allowable benefits diminishes the applicants’ enthusiasm for Kirschstein-NRSA support, which undermines the program’s prestige and reduces its effectiveness. In order to best serve these promising researchers early in their professional careers, Wells notes that it is imperative that the benefits disparities between Kirschstein-NRSA awards and other funding mechanisms be resolved. In his letter, Wells highlights FASEB’s recommendation that Kirschstein-NRSA awards allow for the costs of health and other benefits. Moreover, he states that it is critical that additional funding to offset these costs be appropriated in order to preserve funds for research-related expenses that are essential to professional development.

What We’ve Been Doing

FASEB Writes Joint Letter with AAMC on OMB Peer Review

In a joint December 4th letter to Dr. Margo Schwab in OMB’s Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, AAMC and FASEB commented on the agency’s Proposed Bulletin on Peer Review and Information Quality, 68 FR 54023-29. This Bulletin seeks to standardize peer review requirements relating to significant federal regulatory actions. In their letter, FASEB President Robert Wells and AAMC President Jordan Cohen noted that “...our member organizations contribute extensively to and rely heavily upon research findings, data, and other information that may be incorporated in disseminations by the Public Health Service (PHS), and consequently take great interest in this notice.”

While Cohen and Wells point out their organizations support the ultimate aim of the proposed Bulletin – helping further ensure that the quality of information released by federal agencies meets consistent standards and that major federal regulations and related actions are based upon sound science – they express their profound concerns about the “procrustean” processes that the Bulletin would impose, especially from the perspective of the PHS agencies.

One of the first concerns verbalized by Cohen and Wells in their joint letter is that they believe that the proposed peer review standards are overly prescriptive and indifferent to generally respected, widely emulated practices of major federal science agencies in determining scientific merit. The second major concerns focuses on the proposed requirements’ likely interference with timely, responsible public health announcements to the detriment of the public weal. The full text of the joint letter, with details of each of these areas of concerns, is available at http://www.faseb.org/opa/ppp/regburden/OMB_Peer_Review_Final_1_1.pdf.

Cohen and Wells concluded the joint letter with strong language in favor of allowing federal regulatory agencies to retain appropriate flexibility in the implementation of peer review standards for scientific and technical information relevant to new rulemaking or dissemination. “As written,” they state, “the Bulletin conveys a disconcerting view of the state of science in federal regulatory agencies, effectively mandating a ‘receivership’ regime for the evaluation of scientific information supporting especially significant regulatory actions. If certain regulatory agencies lack the appropriate capacity, expertise, or will to perform credible evaluations of scientific and technical information, these deficiencies would be better addressed within those agencies themselves, or by direct intervention of the OMB or Congress as necessary. The superposition of one-size-fits-all, government-wide processes will inevitably have unintended adverse consequences and, in our opinion, absent a demonstrable systemic problem, is not the optimal way to compensate for any specific agency’s scientific failings.”

FASEB Expresses Concern over Restrictive New Visa Policies

In response to a series of Senate Judiciary Committee hearings exploring visa issues, FASEB expressed its concerns on the subject in a letter to Senate Judiciary Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-UT). FASEB has closely followed the impact of new visa policies on the research enterprise given that scientific research and education are international in nature.

In his letter, FASEB President Robert Wells notes that “[s]cientific advancement depends upon researchers’ ability to collaborate, to share discoveries and to train the next generation of young scientists. The network that supports these activities extends worldwide, and policies that interfere with this interaction also interfere with the progress of science and medicine.” Using the example of the Human Genome Project, Wells points out that this effort was an international collaboration, as scientists from three continents worked together to decipher the human DNA code. In addition, he quotes a recent front-page article in the Washington Post, which states that more than one-third of American Nobel Prize winners are foreign born. “Moreover, important medical treatment centers, like the Mayo Clinic, benefit from foreign scientists and physicians who are willing to bring their expertise to the United States,” states Wells.

In order to foster medical progress, it is imperative that undergraduate and graduate students in science and medicine, as well as postdoctoral trainees, are able to study at U.S. universities and academic institutions. It is here that they meet future collaborators in their fields; it is here that their mentors guide them in the ethical conduct of research; and it is here that they contribute to U.S. progress in biomedicine. Although we have heard anecdotal evidence from our members that post-September 11th visa policies have affected their ability to attract foreign students to their institutions and labs, the [Institute of International Education report which details a decrease in the number of foreign students enrolled at American universities] is the first quantitative evidence that we are facing a serious problem.

Wells also expresses concern about travel restrictions for foreign students and scientists who are studying in the U.S., which stifle their capacity to attend scientific conferences. Given the importance of these meetings, “visa policies that make it difficult for students and scientists to participate in these meetings can, quite simply, bring the rapid progression of science and medicine to a grinding halt.” Wells notes that the biomedical research community is concerned about our national security, and highlights ways in which scientists have worked tirelessly to combat bioterrorism. Therefore, “[w]e understand the need for reevaluating or modifying our visa and immigration system to protect our citizens. However, there is also a critical need to battle the disease and injuries that hold millions of our citizens hostage through suffering and pain. Medical advancement thrives in an environment that cultivates open exchange of science and education. Based on the IIE report, we are not encouraging such an environment, and this may ultimately lead to us losing the best and brightest students and scientists to other nations.”

For the full text of the visa letter, go to the FASEB website at http://www.faseb.org/opa/ppp/homeland/Visa_ltr_12x03.pdf.

FASEB President Thanks Sen. Specter for Efforts to Protect Stem Cell Research

Legislation that would bar the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office from issuing a patent on a “human organism,” including any human embryo created by researchers was included as an
amendment to the FY 2004 Consolidated Appropriations Bill that Congress passed on January 22nd. The amendment, proposed by Rep. Dave Weldon (R-FL), was originally added to the FY 2004 Commerce/Justice/State Appropriations bill, which was then rolled into the Omnibus Appropriations legislation.

While Rep. Weldon publicly stated that the policy would not apply to stem cell research or patenting genes, there remains some concern within the research community that the amendment could be interpreted broadly to prevent the development of stem cells for medical therapies. The amendment appears to expire in a year so it is believed that have further opportunity to provide input on this issue.

Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) attempted unsuccessfully to modify the language in the Weldon amendment from “human organism” to “human beings.” Specter cited concerns that the impact of the amendment might impede biomedical research leading to cures and treatments for debilitating diseases. Ultimately, the conferees included a reference to language from a July 22, 2003 (Congressional Record, page H7274) colloquy between Congressman Weldon and Congressman David Obey (D-WI). The exchange states “this [language] has no bearing on stem cell research or patenting genes, it only affects patenting human organisms, human embryos, human fetuses or human beings.”


FASEB Supports SEAB Task Force Recommendations on the Future of DOE Science Programs

In a January 9th letter to Spencer Abraham, Secretary of the Department of Energy, FASEB President Robert Wells urged the adoption of the recommendations of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB) Task Force on the Future of Science Programs at DOE. In addition, he expressed support for the 20-year facility plan that Secretary Abraham announced in November of 2003. “The thoughtful implementation of the plan,” Wells stated, “in conjunction with the adoption of these recommendations, will help ensure the health of the nation’s research activities and the achievement of DOE’s mission.”

The network of national laboratories and scientific user facilities operated by DOE has led to profound breakthroughs in medicine, environmental science, biology, and physics that continue to transform the way we all live. According to Wells, “[w]ork at the interface of frontier disciplines like bioinformatics, genomics, proteomics, and nontechnology is greatly enhanced by DOE’s capacity in large-scale computational and research tools based upon physical science and engineering.”

Wells noted that FASEB concurs with the Task Force in recognizing the need to reverse past decades of static investment in science and engineering. This lack of federal support has affected the ability of DOE to maintain the national laboratories, which are critical resources for the research and development of new technologies. Of the ten Task Force recommendations, Wells highlighted the need for merit-based competition, collaboration with industry and academia, increased investment in DOE’s science programs and an increased role for the Agency in the education and training of scientists and engineers.

To view the full text of the Abraham letter on SEAB Task Force Recommendations, go to the FASEB website at http://www.faseb.org/opa/ppp/nr_SEAB_1x12x4.pdf.
Society News

APS to Host Several Public Affairs Workshops and Symposia at EB '04

The APS is hosting a variety of sessions on key public affairs issues during Experimental Biology '04. These sessions are open to all EB registrants.

Human Research Protections 1a: How to Navigate Human Research Protection Regulations - Saturday, April 17th, 9:00am - 11:00am in the Convention Center, Room 101. There is no charge for this session, but seating is limited so you must register to attend. Contact: Tara Zeitner at 301-634-7950.

IACUC 101 for Scientists: Dealing With Problem Areas - Saturday, April 17th, 11:00am – 3:00pm in the Convention Center, Room 146B. There is no charge for this session, but seating is limited so pre-registration is encouraged. Contact: Alice Ra’an at 301-634-7105 or araanan@the-aps.org.

Making Science News - Saturday, April 17th, 2:00pm – 5:00pm in the Convention Center, Room 140A. Contact: Stacy Brooks at 301-634-7253 or sbrooks@the-aps.org.

The New CSR Review Process: An NIH Review - Sunday, April 18th, 1:00pm – 2:30pm in the Convention Center, Room 147A.

Scientific and Regulatory Challenges Involving Dietary Supplements and Botanical Products - Monday, April 19th, 12:30pm – 2:00pm in the Convention Center, Room 143/AB.

Will You Still Fund Me Tomorrow? The Deficit, Bioterror, and the NIH Roadmap - Monday, April 19th, 3:00pm – 4:30pm in the Convention Center, Room 207B.

Sustaining Integrative & Organ Systems Sciences: Problems, Opportunities, Solutions - Tuesday, April 20th, 12:30pm – 2:00pm in the Convention Center, Room 143C.

Australian Society for Medical Research Honors Former FASEB President

Former FASEB President Mary J.C. Hendrix, President and Scientific Director, Children’s Memorial Institute for Education and Research, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, has been selected to be the national lecturer of the Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR). She will be awarded the ASMR Medal in June of 2004, in concert with the organization’s Medical Research Week. Dr. Hendrix is a member of several FASEB societies, including ASBMB, ASIP, and AAA.

Stanford’s Ronald Davis to Deliver Herbert A. Sober Lecture

ASBMB’s Herbert A. Sober Lectureship recognizes outstanding contributions to biochemical and molecular biological research, with particular emphasis on development of methods and techniques to aid in research. This year’s recipient, Ronald W. Davis, Professor in the Department of Biochemistry, Stanford University School of Medicine, will deliver the lecture at the 2004 ASBMB Annual Meeting on 4:45 – 5:45 pm, Tuesday, June 15, 2004.

Biophysical to Host Discussions Meeting

The 2004 Biophysical Discussions Meeting, Probing Membrane Microdomains, will be held on October 28-31, 2004, in Asilomar, California. The application site (http://www.biophysics.org/discussions/) will open on May 5, 2004 and will remain open until June 1, 2004.

Advances in Skeletal Anabolic Agents for the Treatment of Osteoporosis

ASBMR and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are co-sponsoring a regional scientific conference, May 24-25, 2004, at the Hyatt Regency in Bethesda, Maryland. Submit your abstracts online at www.asbmr.org/anabolics.cfm by February 18, 2004. A limited number of travel awards will be available to the top ranked young investigator abstract submitters.

ASBMR 26th Annual Meeting


ASBMR Awards Deadline

May 3, 2004 is the deadline for nominations for ASBMR’s major awards: Louis V. Avioli Founders Award, William F. Neuman Award, Fuller Albright Award, Frederic C. Bartter Award, Shirley Hohl Service Award, and the Gideon A. Rodan Excellence in Mentorship Awards. The nomination guidelines are outlined on the ASBMR website at http://www.asbmr.org/awards/index.cfm. Award presentations will be made at the ASBMR 26th Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington, in October 2004.

ASBMR Names John Haddad Young Investigator Awardees

The late John Haddad, M.D. was a regular and active participant of Advances in Mineral Metabolism (AIMM) and a Past-President of ASBMR. In 1998, the leadership of AIMM and the ASBMR established the ASBMR John Haddad Young Investigators’ Awards in his honor. These awards enable eight investigators to participate in the AIMM-ASBMR Annual Meeting. The 2004 meeting will be held March 29-April 3 in Snowmass, Colorado. For more information, please visit the AIMM website at http://www.cor.uams.edu/aimm/.

ASBMR congratulates this year’s winners: Florent Elefteriou, Ph.D.; Lorena Havill, Ph.D.; Sophie Jamal, M.D., Ph.D.; Yibin Kang, Ph.D.; David Karasik, Ph.D.; Benjamin Leder, M.D.; Alexander Robling, Ph.D.; and M. Neale Weitzman, Ph.D.

Society for the Study of Reproduction to Host Annual Meeting in August

The 2004 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Reproduction will focus on the regulation of sex determination and development. The meeting, set for August 1-4, 2004, will be held at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The deadline for submitting abstracts for the meeting is March 1, 2004 (midnight CST). More information about the SSR annual meeting and the link to the abstract submission site is available at www.ssr.org.

Teratology Society to Hold 44th Annual Meeting in Canada

The 44th Annual Meeting of the Teratology Society will be held at the Hyatt Regency Vancouver in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada on June 26 – July 1, 2004. If you would like more information about the Teratology Society or would like information about attending the TS Annual Meeting, please visit http://teratology.org or email us at tshq@teratology.org.