

## Congress 110

...That is, the 110th Congress, not a course called Congress 110. As you know, there has been a major shift in the Congress, as the Democrats now have control of both houses for the first time in a dozen years. The House, with new speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), wasted little time in passing several pieces of legislation in the first 100 hours of the House session, including a bill (HR 3) to lift restrictions on federal funding of **stem cell research**. A bill will then have to be passed by the Senate and sent to conference if the language differs from that of the House bill. This was accomplished in the last Congress, but then the bill was sent to the President, and the first veto of the Bush administration was administered. There has been no substantial change in the position of the President on this issue since that time.

In the initial hours of this Congress, focus turned to **federal spending** as well. The 109th Congress failed to pass 10 of 12 fiscal year 2007 (FY2007) appropriations bills and, in place of those bills, passed a continuing resolution that was in place through February 15, 2007, for agencies whose spending bills have not been enacted. Democrats have stated that their intention is to keep the budget under control and specifically that they plan to extend FY2006 funding levels until the end of FY2007 (i.e., September 30, 2007). Maintaining the FY2006 funding level would at least mean that the proposed FY2007 cuts in the Presidential budget would not be imposed. Some adjustments may be made to programs that maintain high policy priority, and, to that end, members of ASHG and the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) have sent Congressional leadership and policy alerts to urge their elected officials (two Senators and one Representative each) to remind the leadership that the National Institutes of Health and the funding of scientific research are indeed high priorities for the health and well-being of the country. We will remain vigilant on these funding issues and will, from time to time, send e-mail messages to ask the ASHG membership to contact their elected officials. We try to be strategic and timely in these requests, asking for responses when the issue is on the agenda of major discussions on Capitol Hill.

The **Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act** (GINA) is also back on the agenda of the new Congress, with the bill introduced in the House (HR 493) and the Senate (S 358) in the latter part of January. ASHG remains active in the Coalition for Genetic Fairness, the group focused on the passage of this latest version of the bill. The identical wording was introduced in both houses and reflects the version most recently passed unanimously by the Senate in 2006. The appropriate committees in the two houses will mark up the bill, and then it will go to the floor in

each chamber for a vote. The White House remains supportive of these bills, and if a bill gets sent to the President, it should be signed fairly quickly. The passage of this legislation remains a policy priority for ASHG, because lack of appropriate protection of genetic information has been demonstrated to deter participation in research, as well as to prevent some individuals and families from pursuing testing for genetic predisposition to disease. By the time of this publication, additional actions will have been requested of ASHG members, and, hopefully, Congressional actions will have been completed! ASHG will have links from our home page (<http://www.ashg.org/>) to regular updates on the progress of the legislation.

The membership of key **committees** dealing with issues of keen interest to our membership may be found on the FASEB Web site (<http://opa.faseb.org/pages/WashingtonUpdate/>). These members of Congress will be especially important to contact, but it is also critical that all members and their staffers be aware of the activities in their home districts. We continue to encourage scientists to invite their elected officials to their labs to see the important work and advances being made through the efficient use of federal resources. When inviting an elected official to visit, it is important to contact your university officials (i.e., the Government Affairs office) to inform them, so that they may assist you in the planning of the visit.

### International Issues

Although much of our energy is focused on the actions of the U.S. Congress, primarily because the funding issue is so critical to thousands of our ASHG members, we are keenly aware that many of the issues facing research are global in nature. We continue to follow the leadership of other nations and international scientific organizations in issues such as stem cell research policies.

In the past few years, we have worked with colleagues and the State Department to streamline the documentation process for students and postdoctoral fellows coming into the United States. ASHG continues to seek input from our international members regarding issues of importance to them.

If you have ideas or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jboughman@ashg.org](mailto:jboughman@ashg.org).

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