

Obama's 2013 budget to increase corporate influence over public research

Nicholas Russo
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Public research funding in the Obama administration's proposed 2013 budget is set to remain largely flat. However, the reprioritization of funding in this budget, together with statements by the president, indicates a decisive shift toward further subordination of public research to corporate interests.

The proposed budget would increase overall public research spending by a scant 1 percent to \$140 billion, a de facto cut in light of the current US inflation rate of more than 3 percent. Despite the flat-line in research spending, the proposed budget affects various public research entities by differing degrees.

The Department of Energy's (DOE's) Office of Science, which funds energy research not immediately profitable for industry, would see its budget increase by 2.4 percent to nearly \$5 billion. The DOE's Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E), tasked with "[bridging] the gap between basic energy research and development/industrial innovation," would see its budget increase by 30 percent, from \$275 to \$350 million.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology, which "works with industry to develop and apply technology, measurements, and standards," would see its budget jump by 13 percent to \$860 million.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) would see its budget grow by nearly 5 percent to \$7.37 billion, mainly to accommodate increased collaboration between the NSF and the Department of Education, with the budget for NSF-funded facilities remaining unchanged.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) would see no increase in funding, with its budget remaining at \$30.7 billion for 2013, a 20 percent decrease in inflation-adjusted dollars over the course of the decade. At the same time, the Obama administration is requiring the

NIH to shift \$50 million of its budget into Alzheimer's research. This comes amid a funding crisis at NIH, in which success rates for funding applications are expected to remain at a near record low of 19 percent in 2013, while continued funding for grants will face a 1 percent decrease and new awards will no longer be adjusted to account for inflation.

NASA's budget will remain largely flat, with an \$89 million drop to \$17.72 billion. This would include a \$300 million (20 percent) cut to NASA's planetary science division, requiring NASA to pull out of the ExoMars missions planned jointly with the European Space Agency. Negotiations over these cuts led to the resignation of Ed Weiler, the head of NASA's science mission, last fall.

Funding for domestic fusion research would fall by 0.8 percent to \$398 million, closing the Alcator C-Mod project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in order to accommodate the US's commitment to the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER).

Nuclear physics research would face a 3.6 percent cut to \$527 million, threatening funding for particle accelerators across the country. The Tevatron at Fermilab was permanently closed in last year's budget (see "US budget cuts threaten scientific research"), and the proposed 2013 budget threatens Fermilab's Long-Baseline Neutrino Experiment with a budget cut of nearly 50 percent from \$21 million to \$10 million.

Public research funds account for more than 30 percent of total US research and development funding. In academia, more than 60 percent of all research funds come from federal sources (with another 20 percent coming from universities themselves). This number is even higher for medicine and the biological sciences, with top-tier programs such as the University of

Michigan Medical School receiving more than 80 percent of its funding from federal sources, mainly the NIH.

In his State of the Union speech, President Obama highlighted the role of public research in allowing the massive profits of natural gas companies from so-called “fracking,” declaring, “it was public research dollars, over the course of thirty years, that helped develop the technologies to extract all this natural gas out of shale rock—reminding us that government support is critical in helping businesses get new energy ideas off the ground.”

In light of the reprioritization of public resources toward energy research and corporate collaboration in the current budget, it is clear that the president intends to direct public research funds so as to ensure and increase the profits of industry, in particular large energy companies.

Also included in the budget is \$8 billion for a “school-to-training” program, intended to provide funding for community colleges that collaborate with industry in designing their curricula. This dovetails with the president’s drive to transform community colleges and universities into tools of the corporations (see “Obama pushes community colleges to serve corporate America”).

At the same time, the Obama administration is engaging in scientific censorship of critical public health research related to the bird flu (see “Research on deadly flu virus prompts US government censorship”), and the mining industry is bringing lawsuits and threatening scientific journals in order to delay publishing of the Diesel Exhaust in Miners Study (DEMS), a public health study intended to determine if the breathing of diesel exhaust by miners causes lung cancer.

For scientists, students, and workers, the role of the Obama administration and both political parties as the representatives of the interests of Wall Street and the corporations is becoming increasingly clear. The reorganization of public research and education in the interests of the wealthy is only the latest turn in the transformation of the United States into the playground of the financial oligarchy.

The defense of science and education, the defense of basic research and free inquiry, are inseparable from the fight against global capitalism. Students, scientists,

and the entire working class must unite on this basis in a fight to free the natural and human resources of our planet and ensure human well-being and progress.



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