

Thousands of scientists protest US cuts to medical research

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Thousands of scientists and researchers marched in Washington, DC Monday as the US government was set to cut seven percent of its \$140 billion annual budget for scientific research due to the federal sequester. Up to 15,000 scientists from around the country attended the rally, which was called by the American Association for Cancer Research.

One of the hardest hit areas will be funding meant to support medical research into finding cures for cancer, HIV/AIDS, heart disease, and other life-threatening illnesses. According to Alan Lesner of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), agencies such as the National Science Foundation will give out “between 800 and 1,000 fewer research grants” due to the cuts.

Research into cancer, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer’s and other life-threatening illnesses will be put on hold, Lesner stated, as the cuts were “beginning to deteriorate the quality of American science, and will unquestionably have a dramatic effect on innovation and the economy.”

Some commentators pointed to the threat to scientific research as a whole. “We are putting an entire generation of scientists at risk by the very significant difficulty they see in obtaining support,” said Francis Collins, director of the National Institute of Health (NIH).

Nearly 430,000 research-related jobs across the US depend upon government grants supporting biomedical research. The NIH reported that the nearly \$1.5 billion cut to its agency could reduce the workforce by almost 20,000. Since 2010 the agency’s funding has leveled out at \$30 billion per year. This has not included the effects of inflation, which, when considered with the sequester, amount to a 11.4 percent erosion in funding during the past three years, effectively reducing the

agency’s budget to 2002 levels.

Protesters on Monday gathered outside of the Carnegie Library in Washington, DC to oppose cuts in government-funded research as well as demand increases in the NIH’s budget. Some states, such as Pennsylvania, would see as many as 1,200 jobs and \$73 million in grant money lost because of the sequester cuts.

The attacks to scientific research come as both Democratic and Republican parties move to roll back bedrock social programs, such as Social Security and Medicare. An \$11 billion cut in Medicare funding due to the sequester has already begun to throw the lives of thousands of senior citizens receiving cancer treatments into peril. Due to the nature of the cuts, all treatments administered by a physician, which fall under Medicare B are to be hit by the two percent cut, meaning many clinics will no longer be reimbursed for the patients they care for.

Last week, the Obama administration announced a \$100 million grant to NIH for the mapping of the human brain. Dubbed the Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative, the study is meant to depict the behavior of neurons involved in activities such as learning, memory, and other forms of cognition.

Mainly preoccupied with economic concerns, Obama was quoted saying, “We can’t afford to miss these opportunities while the rest of the world races ahead. We have to seize them. I don’t want the next job-creating discoveries to happen in China or India or Germany. I want them to happen right here.”

As this makes clear, science, like every other aspect of human culture, is to be subordinated to the profit and militaristic needs of American capitalism.



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