Public Affairs Report

Societies Thank House Committee for NIH Budget Increase

On 16 July, scientific and health organizations, including ASM, sent a letter to the Chair and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee thanking them for making the National Institutes of Health (NIH) a priority and providing an increase of $942 million for NIH in the FY 2010 budget. The House bill includes $30.967 billion for NIH in FY 2010. The bill also rejects the Obama administration’s proposed targeted funding for cancer research and ensures that all the institutes and centers receive funding to offset biomedical research inflation. President Obama had requested an earmark of $268 million for cancer research out of the administration’s proposed increase of $442 million for NIH in FY 2010. The House legislation also includes $6.643 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an increase of $67 million over FY 2009.

NIH Meeting on Proposed Revisions to RDNA Guidelines

Ronald Atlas, cochair of the ASM Public and Scientific Affairs Board Committee on Biodefense, participated in the 23 June public consultation meeting held by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to discuss proposed changes to the NIH Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant DNA Molecules. Atlas presented comments on the revision to Section III-A-1 concerning experiments involving the deliberate transfer of a drug resistance trait to microorganisms. In the current NIH Guidelines, if the microorganism is known to acquire the trait naturally, then the transfer of the drug resistance does not require approval by the NIH Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee and the NIH Director. ASM forwarded a letter to NIH on 9 April commenting on the proposed change, stating that the current system of oversight in the NIH Guidelines has provided appropriate measures to protect the public health, that it is not clear that changes in the NIH Guidelines are needed, and that guidance regarding which experiments require RAC review and how Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBCs) and investigators can enhance protection of public health is a sound approach.

NIH IBC Conference

On 24–25 June, Ronald Atlas, cochair of the ASM Public and Scientific Affairs Board Committee on Biodefense, participated in the NIH Office of Biotechnology Activities professional development conference for Institutional Biosafety Committees, entitled “Promoting Optimal Practice Now and In the Future.”

Joint Commission Liaison Network Meeting

Yvette McCarter, member of the Public and Scientific Affairs Board Committee on Laboratory Practices represented ASM at the 17th Annual Joint Commission Liaison Network Forum, 8–9 July 2009 at The Joint Commission Headquarters in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. The Liaison Network was established in 1992 to improve communications between The Joint Commission (TJC) and health care professional groups. The major themes of this year’s meeting were promoting a uniform culture of safety among health care organizations and the incorporation of Robust Process Improvement (RPI) into the processes at TJC to provide sustained improvement in quality to customers. There was a discussion on the use of RPI to develop and implement tools to improve the consistency of standards interpretation, reduce the standards development time cycle, and accelerate the timeframe of standards integration. The Joint Commission is also undertaking a standards renewal project in an effort to generate standards that are easier to understand, to remove outdated and poor standards, and to fix standards that are written in ambiguous language. Standards will be reviewed to determine how important the standard is to patient safety and quality.

ASM Participates in CMS Lab Payment Meeting

On 14 July, Vickie Baselski, chair of the Public and Scientific Affairs Board (PSAB) Committee on Professional Affairs, presented ASM’s recommendations to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding coding and payment determinations for new laboratory tests that will be included in the 2010 Clinical Laboratory Fee Schedule (CLFS). ASM com-
mented on three new microbiology tests, three new immunology tests, and two new tissue typing tests. ASM’s statement, which was based on review and input from the PSAB Committees on Professional Affairs and Laboratory Practices, included information on test purpose and methodology, costs and charges, as well as recommendations and rationale for how each test should be coded and reimbursed under the CLFS. For more information on the meeting as well as the list of new tests, go to http://www.cms.hhs.gov/ClinicalLabFeeSched/Downloads/LabCode-Meeting.pdf. Please contact the ASM Office of Public Affairs at publicaffairs@asmusa.org for a copy of ASM’s statement.

ASM Comments on CDC CAUTI Prevention Guidelines

ASM submitted comments to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on its draft guideline, “Prevention of Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infections, 2008.” The 2008 draft guideline updates a previous version published in 1981, and is intended for those responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating infection control programs in health care settings. The Public and Scientific Affairs Board Committees on Laboratory Practices and Professional Affairs reviewed the draft guideline and prepared comments; to obtain a copy of the comments, contact the ASM Public Affairs Office at publicaffairs@asmusa.org. A notice about the opportunity to comment on the guideline was published in the Federal Register on 3 June (http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9–12901.pdf) and the draft guideline is available at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/pdf/pc/cauti_GuidelineApx_June09.pdf.

ASM Comments on CLIA Interpretive Guidelines

On 23 July, ASM submitted comments to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) regarding its draft Revised State Operations Manual, Appendix C—Survey Procedures and Interpretive Guidelines for Laboratories and Laboratory Services. The Interpretive Guidelines clarify and explain Federal requirements for laboratories under the Clinical Laboratory Improvements Amendments (CLIA). All CLIA surveyors are required to use the guidelines when assessing laboratory performance. Of note was the inclusion of the new CMS policy to allow for streamlined quality control for commercial microbiology identification systems in the revised guidelines. The Public and Scientific Affairs Board Committees on Laboratory Practices and Professional Affairs reviewed the draft guidelines and provided feedback, which was incorporated into ASM’s comments to the CMS CLIA program. Please contact the ASM Office of Public Affairs at publicaffairs@asmusa.org for a copy of ASM’s comments.

ASM Staff Attends NSF Briefing for the Biological Community

On 24 June, the National Science Foundation (NSF) held a briefing entitled “The Biological Sciences in 2010 and Beyond.” James Collins, Assistant Director for Biological Sciences, discussed the NSF’s evolving priorities and identified the Foundation’s top six for FY 2010: Climate Research, Innovation, Disciplinary Research, Research Resources, National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON), and Education and Learning. The NSF BIO directorate received $260 million in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and $733 million is requested for BIO in the FY 2010 President’s budget. Although the America COMPETES Act, signed in 2007, authorized doubling the NSF’s funding to $11.2 billion by FY 2011, Collins discussed the Foundation’s current budget projections which anticipate, based on the FY 2010 budget request, reaching a funding level of $11.2 billion by FY 2016. The briefing also touched on the NSF’s ongoing efforts to utilize BIO funding and maintain innovation by investing in interdisciplinary research, developing new management structures and exploring new partnerships with other directorates, agencies and organizations.