

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2015—16:27

Budget boon for biomedical research

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The US Congress has become famous for political gridlock but shortly before going home for the holidays, members approved a 2009-page budget for fiscal year 2016 with generous increases for some key health and science agencies, most notably the [ailing](#) National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Congress doubled President Barack Obama's \$1 billion request for the NIH, providing a total of \$32.1 billion, more than the agency has received since 2003. It includes \$935 million—a 60 percent increase—for Alzheimer's Disease research, and increases of \$200 million for the president's [Precision Medicine Initiative](#), \$85 million more for the [BRAIN Initiative](#), and an additional \$100 million to fight [antibiotic resistance](#).

"This increase comes at just the right time to take advantage of remarkable opportunities to improve human health, powered by dramatic advances in scientific knowledge and technological innovation," said NIH director Francis Collins. In addition to thanking congressional leaders, he also acknowledged the agency's supporters.

"It has taken a lot of effort on the part of many voices—patients, advocates, scientists, our many colleagues in the public and private sectors—to make the case for biomedical research," he said.

"After years of what felt like beating our heads against the wall, we finally got through," said Jennifer Zeitzer of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, which represents 27 associations of professional scientists. More members of Congress began to recognize that "biomedical research is critical to the economy and saves lives," she said, including some conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives who spoke publicly about their willingness to support a substantial increase for NIH.

Other budget highlights include \$21.5 billion for the Food and Drug Administration, a 5% increase which was nearly all of what the president requested and also more than the House of Representatives and the Senate had separately approved. It includes a 9% boost to implement the Food Safety Modernization Act to ensure that imported food meets US standards, as well as increases for the president's precision medicine and brain initiatives.

Steven Grossman, deputy executive director of the Alliance for a Stronger FDA, was "pleased but not surprised" by the new funding. Because congressional leaders understood that "the needs at FDA are quite pressing," he said they were able to give the agency more than what the House and Senate had appropriated.

Congress set the stage for the budget increases after agreeing in October to raise federal discretionary spending limits, a deal negotiated by House Speaker Rep. John Boehner, only after he had announced he was resigning. Paul Ryan, who reluctantly took over Boehner's position, was widely credited for helping to rally Republicans behind the proposal after only seven weeks as House leader.

"It was a good win," said President Obama, in his year-end press conference after signing the budget into law. "There are some things in there that I don't like, but that's the nature of legislation and—and compromise. And I think the system worked."

But the budget wars are far from over as the US enters a presidential election year. All but one of the US senators running for president voted against the budget, including Independent Bernie Sanders. (Florida Republican Marco Rubio missed the vote.)

