

# An October call to arms: We Are Research!

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**ABSTRACT** The American Society for Cell Biology is targeting the first week of October 2012 (the week before Nobel Prize winners are announced) to launch the We Are Research initiative. The goal of this initiative is to mobilize practicing junior and senior scientists, including graduate students, postdocs, and other lab members, to make contact with their elected officials and neighbors and explain to them why Federal support and investment in biomedical research is vital to the health and economic welfare of the United States. This initiative is designed to illustrate how important people are to scientific research and to supply our representatives with reliable and accurate information in the form of letters, emails, telephone calls, and personal visits.

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All politics is local. This simple and accurate assessment of our elected congressional representatives is as true now as when it was first uttered by longtime Massachusetts Congressman and Speaker of the House of Representatives Tip O'Neill. More importantly, it applies to biomedical research advocacy and education just as it does to other government issues and debates. We sometimes think we can influence our representatives only if we go to Washington to talk to them. But our elected representatives are keenly aware of what their constituents want, and they pay great attention to the letters and visits they get, whether in Washington or at their home offices. This simple principle provides a great opportunity to influence the direction of national policies for biomedical research funding, as well as other policy initiatives. Taking advantage of this principle is the goal of We Are Research ([www.ascb.org/wearesearch.html](http://www.ascb.org/weareresearch.html)).

When I talk to my colleagues, my trainees, and the vendors who visit our labs, it is clear that this is a tough time for biomedical research funding. After years of striking increases that dramatically increased the rate of discovery and expanded our national research capacity, we have endured several years of cuts, flat funding, and small increases below the rate of inflation that amount to cuts as well. The bottleneck we are now enduring is not only bad for our research community, it is bad for our nation and our economy.

The only way for our representatives to understand how bad this funding roller coaster has been and why they need to increase the national investment in science is if we explain it to them. But it takes more than one or two of us—there is strength in numbers. ASCB is mobilizing, and we need all of our members and all biomedical scientists to make the push. We are focusing on launching this initiative the first week in October, which is the week before "Nobel Week" when the Nobel Prize winners are announced and the world celebrates science and its accomplishments. The beginning of October will thus provide a teachable moment when all of us can send a few important messages: 1) biomedical science will help develop new therapies for diseases that afflict the constituents in a representative's district; 2) funding for biomedical science helps drive the economy in a congressional district by employing people, by supporting local small businesses, and by creating new businesses based on the innovation driven by the federal investment; 3) even at a time of deficit reduction, investments in the seeds of the future must be protected; 4) the annual rate of return on the federal investment in biomedical research is high—20–30% a year—this means that biomedical research funding will help cut the deficit in the long run, as it is revenue-positive when averaged over many years; and 5) most surveys demonstrate there is enormous public support for increasing funding for biomedical research.

Armed with these messages, We Are Research can give a coordinated shout-out for biomedical research. Here are three simple things you should do on October 1: 1) Take a picture—it is worth 1000 words. Snap a photo of your lab and its members and share it with your local congressional office. In person is best! 2) Write a letter, send an email, or make a phone call. If every biomedical scientist communicates during the first week in October, we will make an impact. This is a great opportunity, and we must take

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advantage of it. 3) Visit your local congressional office—find a patient advocate and a local vendor and collaborate on a visit to a congressional office. This simple demonstration of how science serves constituent interests is unforgettable in my experience and often changes the perspective of even the most hawkish budget cutters.

It is important to remember why we must do this. As scientists, both junior and senior, we are respected for what we do. Our representatives and community members look to us for hope and for accurate messages about science. They rarely hear from us, but that is

something we can remedy if we work together. If we do not speak for science, no one will, and everyone will suffer from our silence. We Are Research!

If you have questions about participating in the We Are Research advocacy program or science policy in general, please contact Kevin Wilson, ASCB Director of Public Policy at [kwilson@ascb.org](mailto:kwilson@ascb.org).

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