

**Coburn Amendment 65 -- Prohibits the National Science Foundation (NSF) from wasting federal resources on political science projects, and redirects \$10 million of NSF resources to the National Cancer Institute.**

When most Americans think of the National Science Foundation, they think of innovative research in physics, biology, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Most would be surprised to hear the agency has spends over \$10 million a year on political science.<sup>1</sup>

This amendment ensures more federal resources are directed towards innovative science and life-saving cancer research by prohibiting the National Science Foundation from funding political science projects and moving the resources from NSF to the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Reallocating \$10 million from NSF would increase NCI's resources by \$7 million in FY2013.<sup>1</sup>

**NSF's Political Science Program siphons valuable resources away from higher priority research that will yield greater applied benefits and potential to stir further innovation.**

This amendment does not aim to hinder science, but rather to allocate more support for research that will save lives. As federal funds are scarce, taxpayers should not have to pay for studies that have little influence on their everyday lives as they continue to bear burdensome, deadly diseases.

In recent years, NSF has spent over \$10 million per year on political science research.<sup>2 3 4</sup> According to NSF, its Political Science Program supports research on "citizenship, government, and politics," including:

- Campaigns and elections
- Citizen support in emerging and establish democracies
- Bargaining processes
- Electoral choice
- Democratization, political change, and regime transitions

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<sup>1</sup> Due to different spend-out rates, moving \$10 million from NSF allows for NCI to spend \$7 million more per year.

The marginal value of this research is low compared to what finding new treatments for cancer would do for society.

The National Cancer Institute expects to experience a \$250 million cut due to across-the-board spending reductions. In light of sequestration, NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins said, “I doubt that any institutes have funded more than 10%” of new grant applications.<sup>5</sup> This lack of funding will drastically inhibit researchers’ ability to find cures and treatments for life-threatening conditions.

Cancer costs our country \$125 billion annually in direct costs. Undoubtedly, the indirect costs due to lost productivity from family caregivers and other situations double that figure.

This year, over 1.6 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed, according to the American Cancer Society.<sup>6</sup> Over 577,000 are expected to die this year – that’s 1 in every 4 deaths in this country.<sup>7</sup> Cancer is the second most common cause of death, behind heart disease.<sup>8</sup>

And for dozens of cancers, such as pancreatic cancer, liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma), we still have no successful treatments. Should NSF be funding studies of the Senate filibuster while pancreatic cancer patients continue to die?

**Congress must ensure valuable scientific research is not sacrificed in order to fund projects that may be interesting but are not essential.**

Every dollar spent on political science projects could have instead supported a breakthrough discovery of nanostructures or metastasis. NSF should no longer fund political science projects, and \$10 million of the agency’s resources previously spent on them should be transferred to the National Cancer Institute.

The average National Cancer Institute grant costs \$480,980 per year.<sup>9</sup> With the same amount of funding going to political science, NCI could fund about 15 new research projects.

**Taxpayers would have realized a better return on their investment in biomedical research than in political science.**

While political sciences studies may be interesting to the investigators, as investment in this studies will not yield the same return on investment or benefit to Americans as biomedical research.

Consider what grants NIH may have been able to award in lieu of these ongoing political science investigations:

- \$251,525 used to study Americans' attitudes towards the U.S. Senate filibuster from survey results<sup>10</sup>
- \$106,868 to study the rise of candidate-centered elections over those dominated by political parties<sup>11</sup>
- \$47,783 to study American Presidents' level of cooperation with Congress when they utilize executive orders<sup>12</sup>
- \$28,356 to examine the Prohibition movement, in part to help lobbying organizations better understand how to influence policy debates<sup>13</sup>
- \$250,000 to investigate how people perceive the political attitudes of others and operate with group-centered mentalities<sup>14</sup>
- \$144,609 to track how politicians change their websites over time<sup>15</sup>
- \$20,862 to answer the question, "What makes politics interesting?" and to analyze how individuals process messages distributed by mass media<sup>16</sup>
- \$259,231 to execute a national survey on "the role of optimism and pessimism in shaping the political beliefs and behavior of Americans"<sup>17</sup>
- \$91,016 to study which legislation gets roll call votes and to guess the outcome when bills do<sup>18</sup>

- \$23,233 to administer an Internet survey of 1000 people about “how citizens react to public political disagreements”<sup>19</sup>
- \$236,422 to study how lobbying campaigns, logrolling and other trades affect bill development over time<sup>20</sup>

These surveys and models are receiving millions of NSF dollars every year, while groundbreaking biomedical science falls to the ground. **Why should taxpayers have to contribute to studies of questionable value when so many worthwhile biomedical research projects go unfunded?** NCI received 4,143 applications in 2012 for major R01 grants, and only funded 618 of them, leaving thousands of promising ideas unfunded.<sup>21</sup>

Much of political science’s studies have not even generated useful data. Political science often involves finding a situation for which researchers can develop a clean model to predict future outcomes. However, yet one Northwestern University political scientist famously noted in the *New York Times* these models are typically inaccurate.

“It’s an open secret in my discipline,” wrote Jacqueline Stevens, “in terms of accurate political predictions (the field’s benchmark for what counts as science), my colleagues have failed spectacularly and waste colossal amounts of time and money.”<sup>22</sup>

Increasing funding for the National Science Foundation has been promoted as a way to bolster our economy, preserve national security, protect the environment, and educate our youth. As a result, the agency has enjoyed strong bipartisan support.

By no longer funding political science and increasing NCI’s budget, Congress has an opportunity to continue improving the nation’s health and to steward more wisely federal resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. O’Connor, “How to Get NSF to Fund Your Social Science Research,” Presentation at Penn State, 2012,

<sup>2</sup> DiSalvo, Daniel, “Should Political Science Be Defunded?” *Minding the Campus*, February 20, 2013, [http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2013/02/should\\_political\\_science\\_be\\_de.html](http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2013/02/should_political_science_be_de.html).

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<sup>3</sup> “Federal Funds for Research and Development: Fiscal Years 2009-11,” Table 62: Federal obligations for research performed at universities and colleges in mathematics and computer sciences and in social sciences, by selected agency and detailed field: FY 2009, National Science Foundation, [http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf12318/content.cfm?pub\\_id=4177&id=2](http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf12318/content.cfm?pub_id=4177&id=2).

<sup>4</sup> Robert E. O’Connor, “How to Get NSF to Fund Your Social Science Research,” Presentation at Penn State, 2012,

<sup>5</sup> Burton, Thomas and Damian Paletta. “NIH Cuts Began Ahead of Sequester,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 2013, [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323978104578335013555368892.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323978104578335013555368892.html?mod=googlenews_wsj).

<sup>6</sup> American Cancer Society, “Cancer Facts & Figures 2012,” p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> American Cancer Society, “Cancer Facts & Figures 2012,” p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> American Cancer Society, “Cancer Facts & Figures 2012,” p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> “Funding Facts,” National Institutes of Health, <http://report.nih.gov/fundingfacts/index.cfm>.

<sup>10</sup> NSF Grant Number 0960991.

<sup>11</sup> NSF Grant Number 0959200.

<sup>12</sup> NSF Grant Number 1237627.

<sup>13</sup> NSF Grant Number 1247321.

<sup>14</sup> NSF Grant Number 1049125.

<sup>15</sup> NSF Grant Number 1155043.

<sup>16</sup> NSF Grant Number 1264275.

<sup>17</sup> NSF Grant Number 1155404.

<sup>18</sup> NSF Grant Number 1067899.

<sup>19</sup> NSF Grant Number 1223615.

<sup>20</sup> NSF Grant Number 1224173.

<sup>21</sup> “NCI Grant Funding: ‘Zone of Likelihood’ Moves From 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Percentile,” *The Cancer Letter*, November 30, 2012, [http://www.cancerletter.com/articles/20121130\\_3](http://www.cancerletter.com/articles/20121130_3).

<sup>22</sup> Stevens, Jacqueline. “Political Scientists Are Lousy Forecasters,” *New York Times*, June 23, 2012.