

## Budget News

On February 17 President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (H.R. 1) at a special signing ceremony at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Last week House and Senate conferees reached final agreement on the \$790 billion economic recovery bill, and it was subsequently passed by votes of 246-183 in the House and 60-28 in the Senate. The [newly released AAAS analysis](#) reports that the final stimulus plan contains \$21.5 billion in federal research and development (R&D) funding, more than either the \$17.8 billion in the Senate or \$13.2 billion in the House versions. The final bill contains \$10.4 billion for NIH, \$3.0 billion for NSF, \$1.6 billion for the DOE Office of Science, and \$600 million for NIST. The bill also provides \$3.5 billion for DOE's energy R&D programs, and would fund climate change-related projects in NASA (\$1.0 billion) and NOAA (\$830 million). The \$21.5 billion R&D total provides \$18.0 billion for the conduct of R&D and \$3.5 billion for R&D facilities and large equipment.

## Congressional News

Holdren, Lubchenco Nomination Hearing. The [Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee](#) held a hearing on February 12 to consider the nominations of John Holdren for Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and Jane Lubchenco for Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. Holdren's testimony focused on the dual role of OSTP: creating policy for science, as well as science for use in other policy issues. Lubchenco addressed the economic importance of NOAA activities such as weather forecasting and fisheries management, and stated that she supported the creation of a National Climate Service within NOAA. Chairman Rockefeller (D-WV) announced that he intended to bypass a committee vote on both nominees and instead use a Unanimous Consent Agreement on the floor to speed their confirmations.

House Passes Nanotechnology Reauthorization Bill. Although the stimulus bill may have been the major story last week, the House also passed the [National Nanotechnology Initiative Amendments of 2009](#) (H.R. 554), which would require a government roadmap for research on the environmental, health, and safety effects of nanotechnology. The new bill is identical to the NNI reauthorization bill that passed overwhelmingly in the House last year but stalled in the Senate.

Senate Committee Changes Announced. The [Senate Environment and Public Works Committee](#) announced a new subcommittee lineup that eliminated two subcommittees that addressed climate change and added new subcommittees to address the growing focus on green jobs. Senators Benjamin Cardin (D-MD) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) will serve as chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the new Water and Wildlife Subcommittee, while Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and Christopher Bond (R-MO) will head the Green Jobs and New Economy Subcommittee. The full committee will handle global

warming issues. Meanwhile, Senate Judiciary Committee leaders have decided to eliminate the Human Rights and Law Subcommittee, saying that the full committee will continue to deal with human rights, and that President Obama's election makes a separate panel unnecessary.

Senators Launch a WMD Caucus. Two members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Richard Burr (R-NC), launched a [Senate Caucus on WMD Terrorism](#). The caucus will focus on a range of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) threats, including nuclear, biological, and chemical. The Senators plan to utilize the caucus as a forum for legislators, staff, and experts to address the range of policy mechanisms that could be utilized "to prevent, prepare for, mitigate, and respond to acts of WMD terrorism."

Possible Merger of Security Offices Debated. The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs met February 12 to discuss a proposal to merge the Homeland Security Council (HSC) with the National Security Council (NSC), both located in the Executive Office of the President (see webcast and witness testimonies [here](#)). Witnesses on both sides of the issue agreed that personnel involved in homeland security advisory roles need better funding, more attention, and better staffing. Former DHS Secretary Tom Ridge, as well as Fran Townsend, and Senators Lieberman (I-CT) and Collins (R-ME) all strongly opposed the merger, noting that the Department of Homeland Security and the HSC are relatively new entities and should be given the time and resources to mature before considering whether the HSC should move under the NSC. Other witnesses claimed that the HSC could not meet its advisory responsibilities alone and that the NSC should be restructured to incorporate HSC staff and concerns. Traditionally, the White House structures its security advisory staff as it sees fit, but the HSC was created by statute, and the dissolution or merger of the council may need to be addressed through statute as well.

New Portal for CRS reports. The website [wikileaks.org](#) has joined several other [organizations](#) in making Congressional Research Service reports available on-line. Unlike the other congressional support agencies (GAO, CBO), CRS is restricted from making its reports public, although Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT) announced his intent to develop a system for releasing the reports.

## Executive Branch

### People in the News.

- Acting FDA Commissioner Frank Torti has created the new FDA position of Senior Genomics Advisor, to be filled by Liz Mansfield, a scientist with experience at both the FDA and private sector. Her focus will be on helping the agency and those it serves analyze and make effective use of the increasing volume of genomic data associated with the drug approval process, an area in which the FDA has been criticized for lacking adequate scientific expertise.

- Kei Koizumi, longtime director of the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program (and Policy Alert contributor), moves to OSTP this week as Assistant Director for Federal

Research and Development, an appointment that does not require Senate confirmation.

Elsewhere

Anti-Evolution Bill Update: One New, One Defeated. Alabama now has an "academic freedom" bill for 2009; such bills have appeared almost yearly in the state legislature since 2004 but have never passed. Meanwhile, Mississippi's anti-evolution bill, which would have required science textbooks to include disclaimers calling evolution a "controversial theory," has reportedly died in committee.

New Report Calls for Transforming Energy Research. A new report by the Brookings Institution, [Energy Discovery-Innovation Institutes: A Step toward America's Energy Sustainability](#), calls for additional investments in traditional energy R&D as well as the creation of regional Energy Discovery-Innovation Institutes. The institutes would foster partnerships to develop and rapidly transfer highly innovative technologies into the marketplace.

Court Rules Vaccines Don't Cause Autism. In 1986, in response to concerns that lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers might drive them out of business and that essential vaccines would no longer be available in the U.S., Congress passed the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. The program includes a special court to which vaccine lawsuits are referred and which has the power to award compensation from a special fund created for that purpose. Last Thursday, [the court ruled](#) that there is no link between vaccines and autism and that families with autistic children are not entitled to receive compensation. Three distinct cases were tried, each of which was handled by a different "special master." The three rulings were similar and found no evidence that vaccines had caused the children's autism. The [Associated Press](#) quoted Denise Vowell, one of the special masters saying "Sadly, the petitioners in this litigation have been the victims of bad science conducted to support litigation rather than to advance medical and scientific understanding" of autism. The plaintiffs are likely to appeal.

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NIH RO1 who received high scores but did not receive awards should be contacting their program officers to see if they should/can resubmit.