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## UD Professor: Urge Congress to allow more research funding. (Delaware Voices)

William B. Farquhar Published 1:52 p.m. ET Aug. 24, 2017 | Updated 2:31 p.m. ET Aug. 24, 2017



(Photo: University of Delaware)

Before members of Congress return to Washington soon, let's send them off with a clear message: funding for scientific research matters.

The House of Representatives passed a spending bill in July that supports a healthy increase for National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding – in keeping with similar NIH funding increases over the last two years. Hopefully, senators will take similar action when they return from summer recess.

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But complicating those potential funding increases is the Budget Control Act, which places strict caps on Congressional spending. So despite Congress' desire to increase support for research funding, its hands are tied unless the spending caps are raised.

Congress knows this dilemma well and has raised spending caps twice before, in 2013 and 2015. Let's strongly urge them to agree on a bipartisan deal and raise the fiscal year 2018 spending caps when they reconvene. Raising the caps will facilitate the funding of scientific research.

The societal value of research supported by NIH is indisputable, and has helped the young, the old, and all ages in between. Federally funded neonatal research has led to a 77 percent decline in infant mortality. Research on cardiovascular risk factors has led to a 67 percent decline in deaths from heart disease.

Vaccines developed using federal funds have prevented countless deaths in the U.S. and worldwide. And life expectancy in the U.S. for those born in 2015 is now nearly 80 years. For those born in 1905 it was a pitiful 50 years.

But there is still a lot of work to be done.

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In Delaware, federally funded research from the NIH and the National Science Foundation (NSF) supports basic and clinical research at universities and hospitals. I am fortunate to be part of a group of scientists studying the role of diet and exercise on human health. Federal dollars support our studies, and support the training of the next generation of scientists.

As critical as NIH and NSF funding is to promote scientific progress, total funding for research only accounts for a tiny sliver of the total federal budget. To invest in the future, we need steady and robust scientific funding. This should not be a partisan issue.

Further complicating matters for research funding, Congress will most likely have to pass a short-term "continuing resolution" (or CR) at the end of the summer to keep the government funded beyond September 30. But should the CR last more than a few months, it could lead to the withholding of research funds and the freezing of new projects.

Rather than passing a long-term CR, a better approach is to raise the spending caps, which would allow Congress to pass an omnibus appropriations bill later in the fall.

So, let's tell Congress to raise the spending caps to allow for real funding increases for NIH and NSF. Scientific progress depends on it.

*William B. Farquhar is a professor of Kinesiology & Applied Physiology at the University of Delaware, and a board member of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and the American College of Sports Medicine.*