I am honored to be with friends of the NIDCR tonight. You do a terrific job advocating for the Institute and NIH overall, and I am proud to be your partner of long-standing. My thanks to Dr. Stohler, the Board and to Peter for the invitation to be with you this evening. I'm told you have had a great day of presentations and discussions, so you are no doubt feeling good about what you and your colleagues have been accomplishing on the research front, and are turning your attention to building on that platform.

I wish I were here to tell you that the climate for research will be bright as you go forward. Unfortunately, it's more like a perfect storm. We can no longer feel mostly confident that federal funding will keep pace with the potential for scientific discovery. The science we will be the most excited about five years from now has a significant chance of being conducted in some country other than the U.S. Certainly, there are a number of serious contenders for that level of international prominence in science -- the rest of the world is not sitting around waiting for the U.S. economy to go into high gear again, or for U.S. policymakers to once again make research for health a top national priority. Instead, those countries can now see the potential for matching and overtaking U.S. global leadership.

Sweden is now the nation with the highest percentage of GDP devoted to R&D, with an increasing proportion directed to life science research. China has pledged to invest $308.5 billion in biotechnology during the next 5 years and South Korea, Singapore, and Germany are also ramping up in a big way. For many years Germany was the world's leader in the life sciences; they aspire to coming back to that #1 role again. Think about it: that could be the U.S. story a couple of decades from now, wishing we were #1 again. I'm not trying to say that other nations should de-emphasize the life sciences -- not at all -- but rather trying to point out that they are using pages from our playbook; they understand that investing in research is an economic driver and a ticket to better health and prosperity for their citizenry. The U.S. is the nation that pioneered that robust federal commitment to research, post-WWII, and in doing so we have heightened longevity, earned a host of Nobel Prizes and have countless born-in-America industry success stories to show for it. Economists estimate that 50% of our GDP can be attributed to investing in research and technology.

Why shouldn't other nations aspire to do the same? And why are we losing interest in assuring our leadership role? What can we, and what can decision-makers here in Washington, do to avert the very real possibility of losing our global leadership in the life sciences? Let's talk about Washington first, and then get to some suggestions about what each of you, and the Friends, can and must do.

This is a tumultuous time to be in Washington -- aren't you glad you came? You get to watch the chaos up close. The winds of negotiation blow hot and then, mostly, cold. The Gang of 6 and

Friends of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research
Dinner Remarks:
“Fiscal cliff-diving is a deadly proposition for research”
December 6, 2012
Washington, DC
then 8 is in, working hard behind the scenes, then out, as they throw in the towel like previous "Gangs" before them. Leadership is optimistic right before they are completely pessimistic. Meeting to break new ground and meeting to reinforce long-standing intransigence. You might say it’s enough to make your teeth hurt to just think about it! Our best guess right now is that we will have a small deal by the end of year, possibly via an omnibus bill, before we go over that oft-cited fiscal cliff. But a small deal will be just that – a bridge to the new Congress. Mainly, we will see the can kicked down the road once more. And what does that mean? It means kicking the hopes of patients who are awaiting new treatments, cures and preventions, to the side of the road; “sorry – you’re just not a priority anymore.” It means kicking the aspirations of bright young scientists in the gut, maybe inspiring them to move abroad to do their science, as some already have, or more likely, forcing them into an alternate career track. We could lose most of a generation of scientists during an extended period of indecision by our political leaders.

Sequestration is one of the things that could very well happen at year end, or a version of sequestration soon after. Under sequestration, federal health agency budgets would be cut by 8 – 10 percent, a devastating proposition for research. The National Institutes of Health budget would lose approximately two-and-a-half billion dollars, and according to NIH Director Francis Collins, this would result in roughly 2,300 fewer grants awarded in fiscal year 2013, representing a quarter of new and competing grants. For NIDCR, this could mean 40 - 50 fewer new and competing grant awards.

That means less funding for tissue engineering and regenerative medicine for the craniofacial region, fewer projects critical to addressing and treating major trauma to the head and face – including complex maxillofacial injuries suffered by troops in combat. Less support for saliva tests to speed treatment during the early minutes of a heart attack and to identify emerging diseases. Fewer grants for gene therapy trials for chronic pain relief. Less funding for bone engineering using stem cells with its enormous clinical potential for the treatment of congenital bone defects such as cleft palates, and more.

What are they thinking up there on Capitol Hill? It's hard to know! I think our elected representatives just can’t get out of campaign mode; they are addicted to media coverage – of themselves – which the media aids and abets. They are mistaking media attention for attending to the nation’s business. They certainly don't seem to be listening to the voters. According to our recent polling, more than half doubt the U.S. will be the No. 1 world leader in science, technology and health care by the year 2020, just seven years from now. Not that Americans want this. In fact, a majority of Americans understand the benefits of research and oppose attempts to make it the bulls-eye for budget cuts. More than half say that across-the-board cuts are not the right way to reduce the federal budget deficit. They also believe that research has a strong return on investment. Two-thirds (66%) say their quality of life has been improved by medical research over last decade, and more than half (53%) are even willing to pay $1 per week more in taxes if they were certain that all of the money would be spent for additional research.

The public is with us on this issue, in spirit at least. But the public has many things to think about. It is really our job to make the case for research. We – that’s everyone of you and all your colleagues -- must make policymakers aware that Americans won’t stand for arbitrary cuts
that will derail studies that have the potential of preventing and eliminating illness and saving lives. Who better to make the case for a stronger investment in research than you? Those who can describe first-hand the cutting-edge research that has the potential to prevent disease, reduce health care costs and stimulate the economy make the best messenger. Again, that means you! Lawmakers want to hear from their constituents; from you. You have the power to make a compelling case with personal stories, and you can provide solid evidence as to why research matters to our health and our communities.

This is the time to speak up. Research!America and our partners, including the Friends of the NIDCR – thank you -- launched our “Save Research” campaign with an intensified week of advocacy right after the election. It will continue until Congress and the administration reach a resolution, so there is every reason to get personally involved with us, joining the many patient groups, scientific societies, research institutions and universities. Together, we are making visits on Capitol Hill and in district offices; engaging in social media messaging, and driving media attention. I encourage you to make use of our advocacy tool kit, which includes an edgy ad you may have seen in Metro stations and in Capitol Hill publications. This ad features a skull and crossbones image with the headline, “Washington politics just might kill you.” The point is to call attention to the implications of deep budget cuts for research and what it could mean for patients and the research ecosystem as a whole. This award-winning ad has helped raise the profile of our Save Research campaign, but successful campaigns take much more than ads. Aggressive advocacy by researchers and all stakeholders in research makes the most difference.

So, there are a lot of ways to get involved. Please don’t assume it’s someone else’s job. We have to have all hands on deck right now. I encourage you to join our intensified campaign to save research. More information can be found at www.saveresearch.org. We must maintain the drumbeat on Capitol Hill using the overarching message -- We need cures, not cuts! If you want to assure a better future for research and health – for your institutions and your careers – you must be heard; the time is now.

Advancing research and increasing knowledge for the improvement of health must be a higher priority for our elected officials. With your commitment and pledge to engage as advocates as well as scientists, we can make that happen.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and observations with you I’m proud to be your partner in advocacy.