

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 25, 2026

The Honorable Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20503

Director Vought:

Decisions about which National Institutes of Health (NIH) research grants to fund should be guided only by science, and what research is most likely to advance new treatments and cures, or the next breakthrough to save or improve a patient's life. The Trump administration considering, at the highest level, an Executive Order to exert unprecedented political control over NIH's grant-making by establishing a commission empowered to veto NIH research awards represents just its latest attack on biomedical research. If established, such an entity would radically alter a nearly 140-year-old evaluation system built upon a rigorous peer-review process where subject matter experts assess applications based on scientific merit. Injecting political interference into the NIH grantmaking process will irreparably harm America's biomedical research enterprise, override scientific expertise, and potentially set back lifesaving medical breakthroughs by decades.

Reports that the Trump administration is backtracking on such an Executive Order is of little relief. This scheme comes on the heels of the Office of Management Budget's (OMB) proposal to rewrite rules governing the administration of federal grants government-wide, which centers on the same aims—to put politics over scientific rigor. These efforts violate longstanding practice and interpretation of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) statutory duties and are clearly counter to what Congress intended when funding NIH. That such an Executive Order was considered at all makes clear that despite Congress acting to temporarily block OMB's proposed rule, this administration intends to continue to pursue efforts to undermine NIH and its grantmaking process. If not by Executive Order or a new government-wide rule, the Trump administration will simply pursue alternative administrative means that put politics over science and undermine the biomedical research enterprise we have built in this country over more than a century that is the envy of the world. The Trump administration will continue to have political appointees review Notices of Funding Opportunities and grant applications. It will continue to terminate scientifically meritorious grants for political reasons. And it will sideline expert peer review and empower political appointees to decide what research to fund or to not fund. Congress must step in to establish guardrails to protect American biomedical science. We urge our Republican colleagues to work with us on legislation to do much more to protect NIH from the Trump administration, which has proven over and over again to be dead set on picking political fights at the expense of advancing lifesaving treatments and cures for millions of Americans.

As the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world, NIH supports research across virtually every area of human health. NIH research has led to countless groundbreaking discoveries, including mapping the human genome, isolating the AIDS virus, and the development of new drugs and treatments for cystic fibrosis, childhood leukemia, Alzheimer's disease, cancer, and rare diseases, among so many others. The NIH peer-review system is the backbone of each one of those discoveries. It is a process established to ensure that taxpayer-funded research is evaluated according to scientific standards and to

insulate funding decisions from political considerations. NIH funding has, for example, supported basic scientific research on lizard venom and sea snails that you or another political appointee without any scientific expertise may well have vetoed as a waste of taxpayer resources, but that very research led to the development of GLP-1 medications and non-addictive opioid alternatives. NIH's scientific and peer review process that you are actively working to tear down is the foundation on which the United States stands as the world leader in biomedical innovation. OMB and unqualified political appointees have no business being involved in individual grant funding decisions and determining which specific cancer or Alzheimer's disease research grants get funded.

Putting political decree above scientific peer review will mean research proposals are rejected not because of deficiencies in scientific quality, methodology, or relevance to statutory NIH missions, but because the subject matter, populations studied, institutions involved, or anticipated policy implications of the research do not align with the President's political agenda. Breast cancer patients should not be denied hope of a new lifesaving treatment because you and the President think women's health research is "woke". Each year, NIH awards more than 50,000 grants and reviews tens of thousands more, each containing dozens of pages of dense scientific material. Whether through Executive Order, a new OMB rule, or other means, this administration seeks the ability to cut funding for specific research institutions it doesn't like, or to cut funding for specific research projects because it doesn't like how they sound. This would mean overruling decisions made by panels of scientific experts that have already determined which research is meritorious of federal funding and is our nation's best bet at advancing new treatments and cures. Congress appropriated more than \$48 billion to NIH in fiscal year 2026 for biomedical research pursuant to statute and congressionally directed programs, to be awarded according to a multi-step peer review process mandated by law. Congress does not delegate, or in any way intend to delegate, authority to the White House or your office to determine which individual scientific proposals may receive federal support. It similarly does not intend for unqualified political appointees to override the scientific peer review process in determining which specific grants to fund. But that is exactly what this administration continues to pursue.

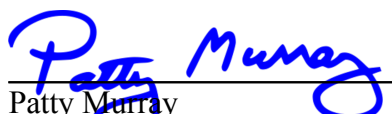
These efforts are just the latest in a series of actions elevating politics and undermining science in biomedical research. Under your leadership, OMB has focused its efforts on destroying NIH and, with it, the nation's biomedical research enterprise. To date, the Trump administration has terminated or disrupted 5,780 NIH grants worth an estimated \$15 billion.¹ Today, 1,231 of those grants still have not been restored. In fiscal year 2025, the agency issued 6,478 fewer awards compared to the year before – fewer than any year since 2018. The overall success rate for grant applicants fell to 17 percent, marking a 30-year low. The Trump administration has delayed NIH notices of funding opportunities and grant awards by months, setting back research and clinical trials on Alzheimer's disease, cancer research, opioid addiction, rare diseases, and others by a year or more. These disruptions are causing young scientists and researchers to abandon their careers altogether or leave to pursue them in other countries. Meanwhile, uncertainties about federal funding have led to a 15 percent decline in doctoral admissions at major research universities in the United States.² Earlier this month, it was revealed that the Trump administration plans to transfer up to \$1.9 billion per year from NIH to the Department of Defense. Taken together, the Trump administration's actions have systematically weakened the biomedical workforce and upended the very system designed to select the most scientifically promising research that delivers hope for millions of American patients and families who are praying for new treatments and cures.

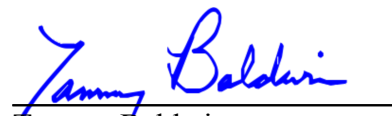
¹ Grant Disruptions at a Glance, National Institutes of Health. <https://grantwitness.org/nih>

² Study Shows Early-Career Scientists in the U.S. are Rethinking Their Future in Academia, July 23, 2026. <https://www.aau.edu/newsroom/study-shows-early-career-scientists-us-are-rethinking>

We write to call on you to abandon any plan to exert political control over NIH's grant-making decisions — whether that's through your proposed rule, a new Executive Order, or any other means—that would empower political appointees to deny funding for grant applications that have already been deemed meritorious by the NIH peer-review and Advisory Council process. Patients and families are already paying an enormous price because of this administration's nonstop attacks on the NIH—the last thing they need is for their hopes for new treatments and cures to be pushed farther out of view because you want to put politics ahead of saving lives.

Sincerely,


Patty Murray
United States Senator


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

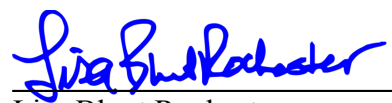

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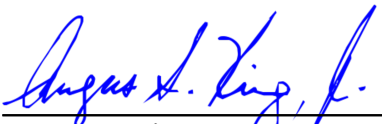

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United States Senator



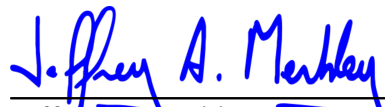
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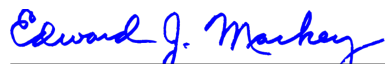
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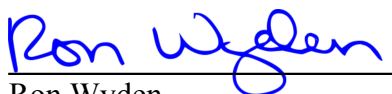
Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



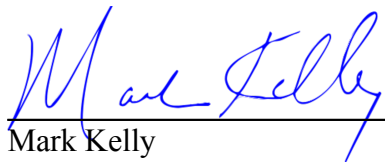
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United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
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Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



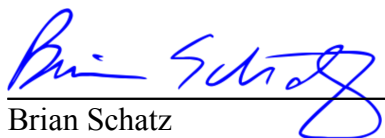
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Bernard Sanders
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