

Trump Seeks Dramatic Funding Cuts to Science

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President Trump's "blueprint" of his forthcoming fiscal year 2018 budget request reveals that the administration is targeting many federal science agencies for deep cuts. Reactions from congressional leaders have ranged from supportive to muted to outraged.

The scientific community has been anxiously awaiting its first look at President Trump's budget request to Congress for fiscal year 2018. The White House had already announced that it would be seeking \$54 billion in new funding to build up U.S. military strength, to be offset by cuts in the non-defense budget. But, until today, it has been uncertain where exactly the axe would fall.

With the release of a 53-page [document](#) titled "America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again," the Trump administration has made clear that federal science programs will be targeted for major reductions. However, these cuts will not be evenly apportioned.

The National Institutes of Health, for instance, is slated for a reduction of nearly \$6 billion, or about 20 percent of its current budget. The Department of Energy's Office of Science is on the hook for a \$900 million, or 17 percent, reduction. Funding for the near-\$300 million Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy would be zeroed out. NASA science programs, meanwhile, are targeted for only minor cutbacks, and at least one program, Planetary Science, would even see a funding boost.

Aspects of the budget appear to be consistent with recommendations from the Heritage Foundation. Some have [noted](#) that it bears striking similarities to [blueprints](#) that the influential conservative think tank has been publishing since 2011.

Some agencies, notably the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, are not directly mentioned in the blueprint. The administration's intentions for NSF and NIST, as well as for many programs within agencies that the blueprint does mention, may not be known until the release of the president's full budget request, which is anticipated in May.

Overview of the blueprint's budget cuts

Taken in aggregate, the Trump administration's proposed cuts to federal R&D programs are remarkably deep. Many are at odds with congressional priorities identified in appropriations legislation developed last year for fiscal year 2017 funding. However, in certain cases, such as NASA, the new administration actually provides more funds than was recommended by the Obama administration.

The following expandable charts offer a firmer sense of where some priorities diverge and how drastically:

Reactions vary from supportive to muted to outraged

The submission of the President's budget request is the first step in the annual budget process, but responsibility for the final budget always rests with Congress. Both chambers are currently controlled by Republican lawmakers committed to constraining the size of the federal government. However, many of them are also strong supporters of spending on science, and most are wary of cuts that would be detrimental to their constituents.

In a [statement](#), Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, commended Trump's focus on national security and said he looks forward to receiving further details.

Rep. Rodney Fellinghuysen (R-NJ), who chairs the House Appropriations Committee, was similarly terse, emphasizing that Congress holds *"the power of the purse,"* and saying he is *"optimistic that we can strike a balance that will enable us to fund the federal government responsibly and address emergency needs, while ensuring this legislation will clear Congress."*

Democrats were less circumspect in their opinions. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) issued a [statement](#) saying the budget would *"devastate the innovation that drives our economy, the research that cures our diseases, the education that empowers our children."* She added, *"I don't see how this budget can survive the light of day. This budget is really a slap in the face of the future."*

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), the ranking member of the House Science Committee, [condemned](#) the budget, saying, *"I knew that this budget was going to be very bad for science, environmental protection, R&D, and clean energy. It is worse than I thought possible."*

Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL), a physicist, tweeted that the budget *"must be rejected"* and that the cuts to science and education *"would be a disaster for America."* In a [statement](#), he added *"It is hard to overstate how much damage this budget will do to our ability to remain at the forefront of innovation and problem solving."*

He then announced he is introducing legislation called the ["American Innovation Act"](#) that would provide for five percent growth at the federal research agencies. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) [introduced](#) the same bill in the Senate.

However, at least one science policy leader in Congress embraced the president's budget blueprint: House Science Committee Chair Lamar Smith (R-TX). *"Today President Trump took the first step in rebalancing and reprioritizing the federal budget. For far too long, vital programs have fallen by the wayside while climate funding continues to escalate,"* he remarked, adding *"This new budget continues to fund priority basic research that will enable policy makers to make informed decisions based on sound science."*

Many leaders of the scientific community have expressed deep concern at the breadth and magnitude of the proposed cuts. Among the societies that have weighed in so far is the American Physical Society, an AIP Member Society. In the society's [statement](#), APS President Laura Greene remarked,

We are concerned about the budget impact on physics, but we are also part of the larger ecosystem of science. The proposed cuts would cripple fields of research that are essential to America's scientific enterprise, economic growth and national security.

FYI's agency-by-agency summary of the White House budget outline is available [here](#).

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