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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515-6015

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CLERK AND STAFF DIRECTOR
WILLIAM B. INGLEE
TELEPHONE:
(202) 225-2771

June 15, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I appreciate the June 6, 2011 letter restating HHS's desire to create the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) within the National Institutes of Health (NIH). As you know, I have concerns about how the creation of NCATS will impact well performing programs such as the Institutional Development Awards (IDeA), which enables universities in Montana and elsewhere in America to participate in the important work done by the NIH, and Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSAs). It is important to ensure any plan maintains the current scope of the programs and expertise that have functioned well within the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR).

In addition to these concerns, I am also troubled that the details of this request are not in the FY 2012 President's budget request, nor have we received an official budget amendment from the President to this effect. Further, we are still waiting for answers to the specific questions posed in my questions for the record from the March 11, 2011 hearing.

If the President decides to submit a formal budget amendment and provides answers to my questions to allow us to review the proposal fully, we will be happy to consider the request. However, until such information is provided we cannot responsibly take any action on this matter.

Therefore, I am very troubled by reports that NIH has already taken steps to start the search for a new director of NCATS in advance of congressional action. I understand that during public discussion on NCATS to the Advisory Council to the Director of NIH on June 9, 2011, NIH announced it has begun the search process for a director and the process to notify current employees of reassignments to be effective on October 1, 2011 in anticipation of NCATS standing up on October 1, 2011.

It seems premature to take these steps in advance of an official presidential request, let alone required congressional action. I suggest NIH cease all action related to establishing NCATS until the President submits a formal request and congressional action is completed.

I look forward to having the opportunity to make a thoughtful and informed decision on a matter of this importance. It is vital we have the correct balance of basic, applied, and translational research within available resources. We must ensure federal programs do not prevent or hinder the private sector from advancing the transformation medical research into clinical applications and economic growth. It is unclear based on the scant level of information provided to the Appropriations Committee thus far how NCATS is the answer to advance translational research.

Thank you in advance for your attention on this matter. I look forward to reviewing the requested information and making a determination, once the budget amendment and answers to my questions are provided. Please contact my staff, John Bartrum, at (202) 225-3508 should you require further guidance in providing this information.

Sincerely,



Denny Rehberg
Chairman

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies