

Each year, Congress creates the federal budget, establishing the funding of the NIH and all other granting agencies. The federal budget works at a much finer degree of detail than most appreciate, regularly creating, resizing, and eliminating research grant programs of all sizes, such as specific NIH funding mechanisms. Congress also considers many non-budgetary changes to medical and science policy throughout the year. Despite the importance of their work, Congress has little in-house expertise in most areas. Therefore, for all aspects of federal policy and budgeting, Congress knowingly depends on the proactive and reactive involvement of its expert constituents.

This presentation will review the structure and realities of Congress from the perspective of a medical physicist who spent the last two years in physics policy fellowships on the Hill. Examples of recent years' continuing resolutions, omnibus budgets, emergency supplemental budgets, and policy changes will be used to illustrate how science has fared and why. Strategies medical physicists can use to help inform policy making will be presented. A full spectrum of opportunities for involvement will be discussed; that is, everything from sending an email to serving on a committee, from spending a few months in a policy fellowship to making a career change into policy or politics.

Historically, vocal individuals and small groups have had a great deal of success in informing and influencing Congress. Accordingly, the goal of this presentation is to inform medical physicists of the many ways they can advocate for the profession and the services it provides.