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Which Would You Choose? Humanizing the Benefits of Research

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Which Would You Choose?

*Humanizing the Benefits of Research.*

Abstract:

Science research is imperative to the continued success of our society. Forward progress in technology and medicine are impossible without funding. President Trump’s proposed budget cuts include cross discipline cuts to the entirety of science, including a $6 billion, 20%, cut in funding for the NIH. The project was intended to showcase the impacts of defunding science specifically at the University. The brochure is a combination of the most recent publications from the University of Iowa by NIH funded scientists and the impacts it has. To view the project there is both the visual brochure and a video form of the brochure. Both have similar information and can be viewed according to viewer preference. While viewing either, just remember to decide which research would you choose to cut?

Narrative:

Science research is often not accessible to the general public including politicians who fund grant giving federal organizations like the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Often it is hard to see the explicit benefits of federal research funding as it can take years to generate the product or come to a conclusion about the study. Thus the goal of my project was to provide specific examples that highlight how the continued push for defunding of science will have devastating consequences at the University of Iowa and on our society. The project showcases the work that is being done by federally-funded scientists at the University of Iowa across disciplines and demonstrates the impact that research conducted at the University of Iowa has and that it should continue being supported. This project has focused mainly on federal representatives as they are the ones who actually vote for the federal budget. However, it is also important for the general public to understand where their tax dollars are going towards thus I am targeting them as well.

The number of scientists in Congress has been very low historically. Using the 113th Congress as an example there were a total of 4 scientists: 1 microbiologist, 1 physicist, and 3 engineers. The graphic below is intended to highlight the vast lacking of trained scientific professionals. These numbers might not concern you off the bat, except that Congress votes on many things that require some level of scientific training, including the budget.
The proposed budget by President Trump has left significant voids in many agencies the fund scientific research. This is innately concerning as we have 4 scientists who can stand up for their discipline and help provide understanding to why scientific research is expensive and often does not lead to immediate payoffs. Thus the goal of the project was to create a document that could showcase the significant impact the proposed 20% cut in funding to the NIH would have at the University of Iowa. Money can seem very not personal, yet I aimed to showcase the human side of research through promoting the effects of recent publications from University of Iowa faculty members had on research.
The process of implementation was more difficult than imagined. Faculty support of my project initially was very easy to obtain, but the tough part resulted in getting time for interviews or even short quotes about how the cut could impact them. My initial plan was to highlight five different faculty members who receive NIH funding and their laboratories to showcase the exact impact these research dollars can have on the community both at the state level and nationally. This was altered due to the lack of faculty response. The project then morphed into a promotion of current research publications of faculty members that were funded by the NIH around 5 major health issues in the US. Trying to showcase how these cuts to the NIH will force decisions on what research should be funded moving forward. So you choose. Heart Disease. Neurodegenerative Diseases. Cancer. Diabetes. Stroke. Which would you stop funding?

That was the ultimate end goal of the project to make people think about the implications of cutting the budget to the NIH and how it will affect our country. To have this impact I have sent the final brochure that I created to the offices of Iowa’s federal Representatives and Senators: Chuck Grassley, Joni Ernst, David Loebsack, Rod Blum, David Young, Steve King.

In addition to sending a copy to every Iowa federal representative I sent each staffer a copy in the hopes of getting the message through. Further directions would include meeting with each representative and talking through the brochure and the impact that it has on labs at the University. The ultimate goal of creating a brochure was finished however, it could be improved by having voices added. I was only able have an individual quote about the impacts these proposed cuts could have on future science. This could further help humanize research and its implications. Overall, this has been a huge learning process and something that has been truly challenging, but ultimately a great experience to showcase the impacts of science research and how defining science will have major implications.