This summer, not even the 17-year Brood X cicadas that ravaged parts of the eastern United States could keep APS’s government relations team off its advocacy targets; we’ve worked on behalf of APS members to push for stronger funding for psychological science and greater application of psychological science in government. In this edition of Policy Watch, we review developments from the past several months and describe APS’s recent activities to ensure that behavioral science is front and center in the places it ought to be. As always, the most up-to-date reports on all things funding and policy for psychological science can be found on the APS website.

APS priorities echoed in U.S. budget process. On an annual cycle, APS visits with members of the U.S. Congress to bring issues of concern to psychological scientists to the attention of Capitol Hill. The hope each year is that Congress will recognize the value of these issues and include formal language supporting those priorities in reports linked with appropriations bills, which dictate how funds can be used in the federal budgeting process. (Appropriations reports help indicate Congress’s objectives behind the numbers included in the much shorter bills.) In July, APS learned that the House of Representatives’ version of appropriations bills related to National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding for 2022 indeed mirrored APS’s priorities. Specifically, the House called for better integration of behavioral and social sciences into the national COVID-19
response and reinforced its support for the wings of U.S. funding agencies that support psychological science. At the time this piece went to print, APS was still waiting to see whether the Senate would echo these priorities. You can read more at psychologicalscience.org/US-appropriations.

More NSF Graduate Fellowships on the way? The NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) is a key source of funding for promising graduate students in psychological science. Each year, NSF offers about 2,000 of these fellowships, some 100 of which typically go to psychological scientists. Over the past few years, however, NSF has indicated that it plans to cut the number of fellowships by about 25%, raising concerns within the scientific community. APS helped lead the charge to encourage NSF to grow the GRFP rather than shrink it. That’s why we are thrilled with the newly issued program solicitation for the 2021 GRFP, which indicates that NSF intends to award 2,500 prizes this cycle. If you’re eligible for the GRFP this cycle, be sure to get your application in by October 19! Read more at psychologicalscience.org/2021-GRFP-fellowships. And stay tuned—sometimes, NSF ends up offering more awards than initially advertised, thanks to congressional interventions or advocacy from groups like APS. Will we see more than 2,500 awarded in spring 2022?

Injecting psychology into health moonshot fuel. In July, APS emailed members to share that U.S. President Joe Biden, Congress, and NIH are exploring the possibility of creating an Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health—or ARPA-H—designed to tackle “moonshot”-type goals for Alzheimer’s, diabetes, cancer, and more. (You may be familiar with DARPA, or the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency—this is being conceived as a “DARPA for health.”) The new agency, if established, could have a whopping budget of over $6 billion. However, there’s no clear plan to involve behavioral and social sciences in the work of this agency in any significant way, despite the truth, made all the more clear by the COVID-19 pandemic, that these factors contribute substantially to most of today’s leading health threats. For this reason, APS is working to ensure that lawmakers don’t overlook psychological science’s potential contributions to health. We’re speaking to our networks at NIH, on Capitol Hill, and in the White House to ensure this message remains loud and clear.

That’s it from us this issue—again, keep your eyes on the APS website and our social media accounts (including @PsychScience on Twitter) for updates on these topics and more. And if there’s anything you’re concerned about in the world of funding and policy, we’d like to hear from you. Please write to aps@psychologicalscience.org.

— Andy DeSoto

APS Director of Government Relations

Feedback on this article? Email apsobserver@psychologicalscience.org or scroll down to comment.