

Republicans could scale back US science budgets

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A researcher works on stem cells at the University of Connecticut (UConn) on August 2010. Budgets for scientific research in the United States could be scaled back with the return of a Republican-majority in Congress as conservatives aim to slash spending to reduce the ballooning deficit.

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The Republican electoral platform, the "Pledge to America," details the party's ideals of smaller government, lower taxes and robust national defense, and vows to "stop out-of-control spending."

"There is a risk that we may have a significant reduction in the science [budget](#)," said Patrick Clemins, director of the research and development

policy program at the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Even before Republicans made sweeping gains in the House of Representatives in last week's mid-term elections, Republicans and Democrats agreed to scale back federal spending in order to try and get the deficit, which amounts to almost 14 trillion dollars in national debt, under control.

President [Barack Obama](#) has also ordered all federal agencies that are not linked to national security to reduce by five percent their budget requests for 2012 compared to the 2011 budget year beginning October 1, 2010.

But if Republicans hold to their pledge, non-defense related federal research spending could dip more than 12 percent to around 58 billion dollars compared to 66 billion requested by the White House for 2011.

According to an analysis by Clemens which shows what could occur if Republicans are able to make across-the-board cuts, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) could see its budget slashed by 34 percent or 324 million dollars.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) could lose nine percent of its budget or 2.9 billion dollars, and the National Science Foundation (NSF) could see a 19 percent cut, or one billion dollars gone from its coffers.

The US [space](#) agency NASA's spending could shrink by 15 percent or 1.6 billion dollars.

According to John Logsdon, former director of the Space Policy Institute at the George Washington University, the recent elections have brought "increased uncertainty for the future of US space program."

"The new Republican leaders in the House are talking about overall budget reduction and almost certainly NASA cannot avoid some of that," he told AFP.

In Clemins' view, the situation may not be quite so dire for those who depend on federal funds for research, given that conservatives have made more moderate declarations since the election has passed.

Republicans have "talked more about oversight" and "looking hard" at programs which might need cuts, Clemins said.

And in a press conference on November 3, the day after the election, President Barack Obama said he was opposed to cuts in research and development in a sign that the White House is likely to oppose such actions by Republicans.

"I don't think we should be cutting back on research and development, because if we can develop new technologies in areas like clean energy, that could make all the difference in terms of job creation here at home," Obama said.

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