Science Policy News
New Year’s Resolutions

As an old year ends and a new year begins, we often reflect on the past year and plan for the future. New Year’s resolutions are often a way to promise ourselves we will do better than the previous year. This coming year, 2016, is going to be a fascinating year for politics and the Societies. I have thought of a few specific resolutions.

New Year’s Resolution For Congress: Pass Actual Appropriation Bills

Congress has not passed regular appropriation bills since fiscal year (FY) 1995 when President Clinton was in his first term and the Democrats had the majority in both the House and the Senate. Since then, the government has been funded by continuing resolutions (CR), which allow the government to run at the previous year’s funding levels, or by an omnibus bill, which packages all 13 of the appropriations bills into one large spending bill. Recently, a new trend has started called a minibus or CR- omnibus, which packages one to three appropriations bills into one spending bill while the others are left to function under a CR.

Whatever the method, omnibus, minibus, CR bills, and their many different combinations, do not make for effective governing. Combining bills prevents proper debate and often allows controversial amendments that would not normally pass to be included.

All federal funding for scientific research is ensnared in this appropriations process, including research grant funding from USDA, NSF, DOE, and other federal research agencies, as well as funding for federal research labs, such as ARS. The inflexibility of the CR in extending current funding levels and its rules makes it difficult for federal agencies to manage their budgets, a problem that has been compounded by the across-the-board cuts required by the sequester enacted in FY13.

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New Year’s Resolution for the Societies: Advocate with a Unified Message

There have been many recent reports of insufficient federal investment in high quality agricultural research to meet future challenges, protect public health, safeguard national security, maintain global leadership, and support producers in the field.

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