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Medical Breakthroughs Begin with Basic Research

The 2009 Nobel Prizes in Chemistry and Physiology and Medicine illustrate how basic research bringing together the physical sciences and biology has had enormous and important effects on our understanding of disease, drug discovery, and health care.

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to three researchers for their work using X-ray crystallography to map the position for the hundreds of thousands of atoms that make up the ribosome. While the initial purpose of the work was to answer basic questions about the makeup of ribosomes, knowledge of its structure has created targets for a new generation of antibiotics.

The Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine was given to three scientists for their work on telomeres. The initial research focused on understanding a basic biological process and has resulted in a new understanding of cells that sheds light on cancer and aging. All six researchers have received supported from NIH.

We applaud President Obama and the Congress for their past support for this groundbreaking research and for their commitment to basic research in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The stimulus funding played a pivotal role in job creation, research, and development of innovative technologies. This commitment to research must be carried through to the 2011 budget to ensure that momentum is not lost in our quest for knowledge that could lead to the next major breakthrough. Federal funding for basic scientific research is essential to the health, prosperity, and future of our country.

The Biophysical Society, founded in 1956, is a professional, scientific society established to encourage development and dissemination of knowledge in biophysics. The Society promotes growth in this expanding field through its annual meeting, monthly journal, and outreach activities. Its 8700 members are located throughout the U.S. and the world, where they teach and conduct research in colleges, universities, laboratories, government agencies, and industry.

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