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The big drug lobby isn't criticizing Trump's budget. That's angering industry insiders



Ron Sachs/Getty Images President Trump listens to PhRMA president Stephen Ubl during a meeting at the White House in January.

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The National Institutes of Health is staring down a proposed [\\$6 billion budget cut](#)¹ that could slash funding for biomedical research. The response from the drug industry's largest lobbying group?

Let's call it tepid.

"As we review the president's budget proposal, we look forward to continuing to work with President Trump and Congress to improve American competitiveness and protect American jobs," PhRMA spokeswoman Nicole Longo said in a statement. She added that the organization remains "committed to ensuring that policies support innovation and value to deliver this new era of medicines to patients."

Biotech — to the extent it can be surveyed on Twitter — was not impressed.

"Those people are truly useless," [opined Michael Gilman](#)², a serial entrepreneur now leading [Arrakis Therapeutics](#)³.

“This is pathetic,” [added John LaMattina](#)⁴, former head of R&D at Pfizer. “The new PhRMA head continues to be unimpressive.”

“Too bad PhRMA cannot muster the guts necessary to speak out,” [tweeted](#)⁵ Dr. Samuel Blackman, an oncologist and cancer researcher.

PhRMA's bland response comes in stark contrast to statements from [the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#)⁶ and the [American Society of Clinical Oncology](#)⁷, which contained terms like “deeply troubled” and “devastate our nation’s research infrastructure.”

To be fair to PhRMA, those other groups aren’t walking the drug pricing tightrope in the presence of a president with a market-moving Twitter account and a penchant for lashing out.

But by punting on an opportunity to stand up for the NIH, PhRMA is opening itself up to criticisms of its motivations.

The group is spending hundreds of millions on [a new advertising campaign](#)⁸ designed to highlight the daring science undertaken by its member companies, promoted by the catchphrase “go boldly.” The implicit statement: Science is difficult and expensive, and thus so too are the products it generates.

But PhRMA's statement neglected to mention just how much of that science owes its existence to early-stage federal funding. That led Endpoints News’ John Carroll to suggest a new tag line for the lobbying group: “[go quietly](#)⁹.”

Links

1. <https://www.statnews.com/2017/03/16/trump-budget-science-research/>
2. https://twitter.com/michael_gilman/status/842428742890852357
3. <https://www.statnews.com/2017/02/27/biotech-undruggable/>
4. https://twitter.com/John_LaMattina/status/842428974252859392
5. <https://twitter.com/drsam/status/842434835100516352>
6. <https://twitter.com/SueDHellmann/status/842419697538613248>
7. <https://twitter.com/ASCO/status/842431610423242753>
8. <https://www.statnews.com/2017/01/23/phrma-drug-industry-marketing-campaign/>
9. <https://twitter.com/JohnCendpts/status/842432227849916416>

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