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◆ Due to Congress' recent legislation to raise spending caps imposed by sequestration, the White House on Feb. 12 released its fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget with an addendum, leading in some cases to two sets of numbers and many questions about the potential impact on agencies. NIH, for example, was facing a 27% reduction, but according to the addendum, the final amount proposed is equal to FY 2017 funding. Complicating the picture for NIH is that the \$34.8 billion in the FY 2019 proposal is \$2 billion less than what Congress approved for the current fiscal year. Similarly, the National Science Foundation, which was given a drop of 29% in the initial budget, is now recommended to be funded at 2017 levels.

All presidents' budgets are simply proposals and are never enacted whole cloth by Congress, which determines actual appropriations. In this case, the new budget has little to no chance of adoption primarily because it proposes even deeper cuts than floated in the FY 2018 budget—which Congress rejected (RRC 5/17, p. 1). Nevertheless, the proposed budget sparked outrage from various organizations representing research universities and academic medical centers. (2/15/2018)

◆ A recently filed suit accuses the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) of potentially covering up the escape of two animals allegedly infected with unidentified select agents and then firing the head of a lab when she complained, according to two press reports. Filed last month in Allegheny County Common Pleas Court, the suit alleges Kelly Stefano Cole's contract was terminated in January 2017 after she expressed concerns a year earlier about how the escape of two animals from Regional Biocontainment Laboratory, of which she was associate director, was handled, the press reports say. Cole also was an associate professor in several departments, including of immunology and of microbiology and molecular genetics, based on a cached image of her staff listing at Pitt. The suit contends Cole was disciplined for small infractions, required to undergo retraining and ultimately was "fired." A Pitt official was reported to have declined to comment on the pending litigation. (2/8/2018)

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