

Pro-science Republicans are fending off cuts to funding, adapted from *The Economist*, January 15th 2026

“AFRAID OF their own shadow. Afraid of their own president. And unable to even squeak,” is how Senator Rand Paul recently described his fellow Republicans in Congress. The party caucus’s reputation for subservience to President Donald Trump has been well-earned on tariffs, foreign policy, vetting nominees and much else. Yet without drawing much attention, Republicans are standing up to the White House to protect health, science and space research funding from draconian cuts.

Amid a prolonged and as yet unresolved struggle over the fiscal 2026 budget (FY26), which must be passed by January 30th to keep the government open, Mr Trump has proposed to gut NASA’s science funding by 47%, the National Science Foundation (NSF) by more than half, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by some 40%, with its 27 institutes to be pared to eight. The proposed cuts added up to nearly \$30bn.

Those cuts appear unlikely to take hold. On January 8th the House resoundingly rejected the proposals. It also adopted a three-bill package that includes funding for the main science agencies at levels similar to last year, or with smaller cuts and even some increases. The Senate is moving in the same direction, and while NIH’s funding is yet to be finalised, leaders of both chambers have rejected deep reductions or an agency restructuring, with strong bipartisan support.

The resistance began last summer, when Senator Ted Cruz of Texas saved from the chopping block NASA’s crewed space programmes (which have a heavy presence in his state). Later, Senator Katie Britt of Alabama led a drive to release billions of dollars in FY2025 funding for NIH after the administration impounded it.

Why the stiffening spines? One reason is obvious: Republicans and their constituents suffer from cancer, Alzheimer’s and other diseases as much as anyone else, and there is broad public support for investment in the search for cures. Moreover, science research pumps stable funding into Republican and Democratic states alike, through institutions like universities and hospitals, and creates jobs. A coalition of 100 science-based organisations lobbied in states like South Dakota, the home of John Thune, the Senate majority leader, to highlight the local effects of cancelled and frozen grants.

Patient advocacy groups also campaigned to restore funding. United for Cures, a network of groups, organised a vast phone-call and email campaign as well as hundreds of trips by patients to the offices of Republican congressmen. It also funded a seven-figure digital-advertising campaign targeting Republican lawmakers in vulnerable seats.

Before Mr Trump and DOGE came to town, Republicans had often supported science funding more robustly than Democrats. From 1980 to 2020, Republican lawmakers often approved funding that exceeded Democrats’ proposals, including for the NIH, NSF and Centres for Disease Control (CDC), according to a September study in *Science*. Dashun Wang, founder of an innovation institute at Northwestern University and an author of the *Science* study, surmises that Democrats may have historically lagged in science funding because they have a “whole range of competing priorities” such as health care, education or social insurance.

Republican lawmakers have not mounted the ramparts publicly proclaiming their support for science research, as former Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene did when she led a Republican rebellion against Mr Trump to demand disclosure of the Epstein files. Instead they have wielded their power of the purse more quietly, putting their money where their mouth is not. So far, Mr Trump has responded in kind, in silence and apparent acceptance. It may be that science funding proves to be one area of domestic policy where the convictions of congressional Republicans will overcome Mr Trump’s predilection for disruptive change.