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## Standoff threatens autism research funding GOP senators object to limits

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House lawmakers Wednesday implored their Senate counterparts to break a logjam they said is endangering federal support for autism research and funding.

The Combating Autism Reauthorization Act passed the House of Representatives by voice vote Tuesday but is facing opposition from conservative Senate Republicans who argue that Congress should not be dictating to researchers on the front lines how best to spend scarce federal dollars.

"No one who is opposing reauthorization of this bill right now is opposed to autism research or the ideas behind it," said Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, one of four Republicans who objected to the bill when it reached the Senate on Tuesday.

"What we are opposed to is tying the hands of the researchers and the directors at National Institutes of Health and telling them what they should do and how they should do it."

House lawmakers and outside advocates for autism funding held a news conference at the Capitol on Wednesday afternoon to urge a compromise.

"Our work is done in the House," said Rep. Michael F. Doyle, Pennsylvania Democrat and a co-sponsor of the autism authorization bill. "We ask our colleagues in the Senate: If there's a reason that you have a hold on this bill, let's discuss those reasons. Let's sit down and work them out."

Rep. Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey Republican, wrote the Combating Autism Act of 2006 after discovering "disturbing trends" and limited amounts of quantified research on autism in the mid-1990s. He said that even after 10 years of "extraordinary work" that "the issue has not been won."

"There is a sense of urgency," Mr. Smith said. "More research, more coordination needs to be done, and the sooner, the better."

Reps. Smith and Doyle and officials from several autism organizations stressed the importance of getting the bill passed by Sept. 30, when the fiscal year ends. Otherwise, they said, the grants that provide the funding for the programs will need to be sent out for new bids, costing taxpayers significantly more.

Mr. Smith said the funding level was kept at \$231 million because of budget-tightening, even though there is "unmet need that cries out for additional spending."

George Jesien, executive director of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, said the federal autism program "is an infrastructure we do not want to stop."

Added Mr. Smith, "To call [these efforts] to a halt and argue that we don't want a disease-specific bill, we're over that."

Mr. Coburn was joined in his objection by fellow Republican Sens. Jim DeMint of South Carolina, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and Mike Lee of Utah.

Mr. Doyle said he spoke with two senators who had concerns about the bill and that he "did not have an indication that there was an effort to block this thing permanently."

"I'm convinced that we can get past this," he said.

The Senate opponents say some funding for autism research is likely to be included in the stopgap spending bill being debated on Capitol Hill, meaning there will be no interruption in the immediate funding as the reauthorization law is debated.