Well as the saying goes, March came in like a lion and went out like a [very warm] lamb, but not in forensic science. Rather it stayed a lion. As congress moved toward a spring recess they left in their wake a sea of forensic science issues. This is not entirely unexpected though, as many things are up for reauthorization and it is appropriations season, so we have been very busy providing Congress with the positions of the forensics community on various pieces of legislation and advocating for funding to be added to the budget for the Paul Coverdell grant program as well as continuing our dialogue with the Senate and House Judiciary Committees on the S 132.

Appropriations

As you know, the Membership of the Consortium have all signed on to a letter of support to not only add funding to the budget for the Paul Coverdell Act but also to request that a more transparent and process driven approach be taken toward developing the budgets for the forensic community. Your organization should have already sent you the letter with a request to send to your Member of Congress attached to a cover letter from you, outlining your own local concerns and need for this funding. It is important to know that this is 1) timely and must go to your Member of Congress soonest, 2) it cannot be mailed in the US Postal system as it will never get to the key person. Rather fax it or email it to the appropriate staff in the Member’s office and 3) a copy of your cover letter should be sent back to the CFSO so that we can provide it to the key staff on the Appropriations Committee. We have received many of these letters already and thank you for all your efforts and moving so quickly.

Violence Against Women Act

This legislation when originally passed, as with all legislation, had
a timeframe attached to it. The
timeframe is set to expire, so
Congress is re-authorizing it for
another 5 years and in the process
of that, considering new
amendments and components of
the bill that may need
improvement or may not have
been included in the original bill.
One of those amendments that are
being discussed is the SAFER
(Sexual Assault Forensic Registry
Act) Act. The SAFER Act will
provide a national registry for rape
kits and create best practices for
the processing of rape kits, both in
the law enforcement agencies as
well as the laboratories. We have
been actively engaged with
Senator Cornyn’s office discussing
the goals of this Act and how best
to implement them within the
operational setting of the crime
laboratory. While the discussion is
primarily in the Senate right now it
will move to the House soon. We
will keep you apprised of the
details and the progress of these
discussions in the event that we
need your assistance in providing
your Member of Congress any
talking points on how it will affect
his/her crime lab or law
enforcement agency.

Justice For All Act

Although this bill is not formally
up for discussion right now it will
be up for re-authorization again
and we are told that it will be
brought up for discussion in the
Senate soon after Spring recess.
As such we are reviewing the
previous bill and discussing with
staff our concerns with Coverdell
and other programs on in this bill.
On a positive note, we have
already been informed that the
Senate will attempt to increase the
amount for Coverdell funding in
this re-authorization bill.

Senate Science Committee

As you know, the Senate Science
Committee has also begun
discussions on the matter of
forensic science. In particular,
they are interested in research and
standards. Senator Rockefeller,
the Chair of the Committee, is
expected to release legislation
shortly. We have had numerous
discussions with the Majority and
Minority of this Committee about
the positions of the forensic
community. We have provided
our various organizations’ original
NAS position papers and
responded to questions. The
Ranking Member of the
Committee requested a briefing
from his Crime Lab last month and
we were invited to attend. We
were fortunate enough to have
over an hour with Senator
Boozman and provided him an
overview of our memberships’
original positions on the NAS
study and he is reviewing them and
providing questions to us on a
regular basis. We are working
toward a visit to a Crime Lab, law
enforcement agency and Medical
Examiner’s office for the
Committee staff.

S132

We continue to meet with Senator
Leahy’s staff on his legislation and
he continues to listen to our input.
As you know, this legislation
encompasses issues that affect all
disciplines, laboratories, agency
operations, and individual
examiners. We expect to have the
next draft for review shortly and
are hopeful that we can help the
Senator move it to markup if we
are comfortable with the changes
that he has made.

As always if you have questions or
ideas and would like more detail
about the legislation we have
discussed please don’t hesitate to
call or email us.

Coming in May: Forensic FY13
budget preview