

March 31, 2014

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
House Committee on Science,
Space and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith:

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), I write regarding the Frontiers in Research, Science and Technology (FIRST) Act currently pending before your Committee. I believe that we share the same intent for this legislation as you do: strong and effective federal research agencies, which will help our country close its innovation deficit and build a better America. To that end we appreciate the opportunity to express our views to you.

APLU has a membership of 235 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations. Our member institutions are in all 50 U.S. states and collectively conduct over \$38 billion in university-based research. As such, APLU and our member institutions are keenly interested in the positions advanced in important science policy legislation such as the FIRST Act. As you may recall, APLU was a strong proponent of the original COMPETES Act of 2007 and also actively advocated for passage of the first reauthorization of COMPETES in 2010.

The FIRST bill, as passed by the Subcommittee on Research and Education, poses several issues for APLU and our membership. Knowing of your appreciation for higher education and the federal government's role in funding research, I want to raise these issues in hopes of working with you to ameliorate them as the bill advances.

You'll recall that last July, I joined with other university, business and science leaders in endorsing a set of "guiding principles" for a COMPETES reauthorization which we could all enthusiastically support. Those principles include a strong position that the funding targets set out in the reauthorization of the research agencies should be at robust levels indicative that science funding across all disciplines is a top national priority. The funding levels should also provide policy makers with a target to strive for when setting budgets and allocating appropriations. We believe the current FIRST bill falls short in its funding levels, providing less than inflationary growth for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and far less than the authors of the National Academies report, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* (RAGS) recommended. Such funding levels would only escalate our innovation deficit. The highly acclaimed and nonpartisan RAGS report, upon which the COMPETES bills were based, urged the U.S to make the investments needed to

“compete, prosper, and be secure in the global community of the 21st century.” The research that NSF and NIST fund has proven to be an excellent investment for the U.S. The discoveries that come from this research drive our economic growth, strengthen our national security, and enhance the quality of life for our citizens. As such, we believe that this federal spending should increase at strong and steady levels and that the FIRST bill should reflect those goals.

The FIRST bill also seeks to cut funding for specific NSF directorates – the Geosciences Directorate and the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate – which we believe contribute greatly to all the benefits that NSF research yields: a growing economy, stronger security, and improved quality of life. We are concerned that certain fields of research are targeted for cuts in this bill.

We are also troubled with the changes proposed in the bill to lengthen the embargo period for public access to published articles resulting from federally funded research. APLU is a very strong proponent of public access. As you know, the content of these publications is largely supported by tax dollars and the work of university faculty. We believe the public should have access to the content at an early point in time. The current 12-month embargo period proposed by the Office of Science and Technology Policy is a reasonable starting place and we certainly do not want to see that period extended.

Further concerns with the current FIRST bill involve provisions that would make changes to the NSF grants process, which we do not think are necessary, e.g. restricting the length of time any individual researcher can be funded by the NSF; imposing additional scientific misconduct requirements on NSF researchers on top of the very strong and sound policies already in place; and limiting an NSF researcher from receiving support from other federal agencies for research with similar scientific objectives. We would like to talk further with you about these provisions and our mutual goal of a strong and effective NSF. Additionally, we share your objectives for better coordination among federal STEM education programs, and wish to discuss these parts of the bill with you.

Thank you for your interest in our nation’s scientific capabilities and research prowess. I hope we can work together to ensure that the FIRST bill reflects our common goals as well as the goals that the National Academies set forth in the *Gathering Storm* report, and that it helps close the innovation deficit. I believe my staff is meeting with your staff this week and I look forward to further conversations with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter McPherson". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Peter McPherson
President

CC: Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson