

April 21, 2015

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

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member  
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
394 Ford House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

Thank you very much for your support of basic research and for HR 1806, the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015. While we recognize the challenges your committee faces due to the spending caps set by the Budget Control Act and House rules requiring budget offsets, we are writing to express concerns about certain provisions in the bill that we believe would be harmful to the research and development supported by the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Standards and Technology, and Department of Energy.

As a coalition of physical science societies, we join you in recognizing the importance of robust support of the U.S. scientific research enterprise. Research funded by the federal government, as noted in the bill, is critical to long term economic growth. We understand that Congress is faced with addressing many fiscal challenges and are appreciative of the funding levels allotted to the physical sciences. However, given our shared interest in encouraging interdisciplinary research that is vital to the national interests, we are concerned about the bill's stipulated division-level funding in the NSF. For example, potential decreases in the NSF geosciences division would negatively affect solar physics and space weather research, both of which have important practical applications. The significant cuts proposed for the biological research division will be problematic for advances in biophysical sciences.

Given our shared interest in increasing the number of STEM graduates, we are concerned that HR 1806 cuts funding for the National Graduate Research Fellowship Program. However, we are pleased that the bill expands the applicant pool for the Noyce Scholarship Program. This will allow more STEM graduates the opportunity to become highly qualified K-12 STEM teachers.

We would like to express concern regarding the significant cuts in funding for the DOE ARPA-E program as well as for the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Research and Development programs. HR 1806 removes some of the goals of the ARPA-E program which will limit the innovative research being conducted at universities and national laboratories. The bill's requirement that the Biological and Environmental Research program prioritize biological systems over climate and environmental research ignores the independent review process that has a track record of establishing funding priorities and allocating grants based on scientific merit.

HR 1806, as currently written, does not support the NSF research process that has been deemed an international gold standard. We stand ready to work with you and the entire House Science, Space and Technology Committee to address the above concerns and strengthen the policies that support the federal research and development enterprise.

Sincerely,

American Association of Physics Teachers  
AVS: Science & Technology of Materials, Interfaces, and Processing  
The Optical Society  
American Institute of Physics