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April 22, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space and
Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space and
Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson,

On behalf of Research!America, the nation’s largest public education and advocacy alliance committed to elevating medical progress to a higher national priority, I write to provide comments on the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806), which the Committee plans to mark up today, April 22, 2015. Research!America recognizes that the Committee must navigate a challenging fiscal, political and ideological landscape as it seeks to establish sound science policy, and we appreciate your mutual commitment to strengthening our nation’s scientific capacity.

U.S. science policy bears significantly on the wellbeing of this and future generations, as well as national and global security. It is therefore profoundly important to “get it right.” Unfortunately, The America COMPETES Reauthorization Act contains several provisions that we believe would compromise scientific progress to the detriment of our country and its citizens.

The first of these provisions would establish a funding path for the National Science Foundation (NSF) that allows for no funding growth in fiscal year 2017, despite the role NSF funding plays as a catalyst to American innovation: innovation that expands our economy, protects American interests, and seeds human progress. We appreciate that the decision to constrain funding in this manner may well be grounded in the stringent budget caps established under the 2011 Budget Control Act, and we ask that this influential Committee weigh in on replacing those caps with a pragmatic national budget strategy in line with our nation’s strategic objectives. We believe it is a mistake to allow a contingency budget plan established four years ago to dictate funding levels today. We ask that you revisit the overall funding levels in H.R. 1806, and grow NSF funding at a rate that lays the groundwork for American innovation to flourish, not languish.

Research!America also urges the committee to revisit provisions in the bill that would handcuff NSF by overriding its authority to allocate directorate level funding. The very fact that the Committee opted to dramatically cut the Social, Behavioral and Economic (SBE) Sciences Directorate underscores the importance of refraining from the micromanagement of NSF. Research that

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provides insight into human interactions and behavior advances the same objectives as the physical sciences; by fueling innovation, addressing emerging and ongoing issues in the national interest, and catalyzing human progress. It is social science that is helping experts prevent cyber- and other forms of terrorism, economic science that identifies cost-saving efficiencies in public and private sector enterprises, and behavioral science that responds to Americans' demand for strategies that heighten their self-determination and success in both the personal and professional arenas. Hamstringing this research is not in the public interest. Research!America asks that the Committee eliminate the provisions in H.R. 1806 that allocate funding across directorates and permit NSF to continue supporting the most promising science across research disciplines, including social, behavioral and economic science.

Other provisions in H.R. 1806 are highly problematic, including language that appears to require NSF to evaluate scientific research programs undertaken by all other federal agencies. There is no justification provided for this requirement, nor are there any additional resources included in the bill for its execution. Further, H.R. 1806 imposes an additional set of requirements on the grantmaking process, even though the bill acknowledges that over-regulation is already an issue in this area. Research!America respectfully requests that the Committee revisit these provisions of the bill and work directly and collaboratively with NSF to ensure Congress receives the information it needs to be confident of the appropriate use of federal research funding.

In the context of over-regulation, Research!America would like to thank you for including provisions in the bill designed to address onerous administrative requirements that waste federal research dollars and slow scientific progress. In the current fiscal climate, there simply is no excuse to waste one dollar, much less millions, on regulatory requirements that impart no value to taxpayers. Under your leadership, the Committee has played an important role in bringing attention to this issue, and we truly appreciate it.

Science has no political affiliation. Advancing innovation is a top national priority as it bears on improving human health, strengthening our economy and securing our national defense. Research!America hopes that the members of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee will work together to advance the nation's best interest. Thank you and your respective staff members for your hard work and dedication. If you have questions about this letter, please contact Caitlin Leach at (703) 739-2577 or cleach@researchamerica.org

Sincerely,



Mary Woolley
President and CEO