



CONSORTIUM of SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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COSSA Statement on the House America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806)

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) appreciates the dedication of members of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology to promoting and advancing the U.S. basic science enterprise. However, COSSA expresses deep concern about the *America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015* (H.R. 1806) as introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 15, 2015.

Of particular concern are provisions within Title I pertaining to the National Science Foundation (NSF). While H.R. 1806 addresses some of the concerns raised by the scientific community last year in the *FIRST Act* (H.R. 4186, 113th Congress), major issues still exist that would adversely impact NSF and the scientific community that relies on it. First, the bill sets specific authorization levels for NSF's research directorates, placing arbitrary limits on scientific disciplines and discouraging interdisciplinary research. Current practice for prioritizing research investments at NSF relies on technical experts working at NSF, a world-renown and highly regarded merit review process, and a vast network of scholars housed at universities and laboratories across the country. Picking winners and losers among the scientific fields—as H.R. 1806 proposes to do—based on anything less than these highest of standards would be a disservice to the scientific community and the taxpayers whose funds NSF is responsible for stewarding.

Secondly, within the funding levels authorized for NSF for FY 2016 and 2017 is a cut of nearly 45 percent to NSF's Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE). SBE, the smallest of NSF's directorates, accounts for less than 5 percent of the entire NSF budget. However, the SBE directorate funds approximately 55 percent of all university-based basic social and behavioral science research in the United States. Its impact is profound.

According to the *Guiding Principles for the America COMPETES Act Reauthorization* endorsed by more than 130 national associations, scientific societies, private sector entities, and colleges and universities in 2013, "To ensure our national competitiveness, we need to maintain a strong foundation of basic research across all scientific disciplines, from the physical, mathematical and life sciences, to engineering, to the social, economic and behavioral sciences." Unfortunately, H.R. 1806 instead seeks to place scientific disciplines (i.e. biology, engineering, chemistry, social science, etc.) in direct competition with one another for what are already scarce resources, discouraging interdisciplinary science at a time when it is necessary for addressing complex societal challenges.

The nature of basic science is to explore fundamental questions that may not have an immediate application, but that contribute to a cache of knowledge that builds and progresses over time. It would be folly to undercut basic research that provides the building blocks for future discoveries, especially in the social and behavioral sciences. Limiting our investments in social and behavioral science research degrades our ability to understand how humans process information, make decisions, and communicate with one another and with technology. Social and behavioral science is a critical STEM discipline responsible for advancing knowledge about the human condition.

COSSA hopes the Committee will engage with the broader scientific community to craft a COMPETES reauthorization that moves the country ahead.

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations is a nonprofit organization serving as a united voice for more than 115 professional associations, scientific societies, research centers and institutes, and colleges and universities who care about a robust social and behavioral scientific research enterprise.

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