



April 20, 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:

On behalf of the American Political Science Association, the leading professional organization for the study of political science with over 13,000 members, I write to express my deep concern about the American COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806) as introduced on April 15. The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee's work to promote a strong American science program is seriously undermined by the bill's directorate-specific authorization levels and funding cuts to the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate.

Setting authorization levels by directorate obstructs NSF's longstanding and highly effective practice of setting investment priorities based on the organization's scientific expertise and on its world-renowned merit review process. Directorate-specific authorization levels also open the door to dangerous cuts that threaten the future of America's science program.

The SBE Directorate comprises less than 5% of the total NSF budget, but NSF support has contributed to a majority of the federal funds for academic basic research in these disciplines. The bill's reduction of nearly 45% in funding for the SBE Directorate thus represents a devastating blow to our nation's research agenda. The insights of the SBE disciplines, including political science, are crucial to maintaining America's global standing as an innovation powerhouse. Political science research on topics such as understanding democracy, fighting terrorism, and promoting disaster relief is an integral part of a robust science program that supports America's interests and competitive strength.

The bill states that all the scientific disciplines, including the SBE sciences, “are important for the continued development of enabling technologies necessary for sustained economic competitiveness[.]” Given the bill’s directorate-specific authorization levels and current funding levels for the SBE disciplines, however, it cannot provide full meaningful support for America’s interests, economic and otherwise. I hope that the Committee will work with America’s scientific community, including APSA, to proceed with legislation that promotes a strong national science program through the advancement of all science.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Steven Rathgeb Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "S".

Steven Rathgeb Smith
Executive Director, American Political Science Association