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Through the NSC Alliance partnership with the American Institute of Biological Sciences, we are pleased to provide NSC Alliance members with the following public policy update. With proper attribution to NSC Alliance, all material from these reports may be reproduced or forwarded. We encourage you to share this report with colleagues at your institution. Anyone interested in receiving copies of the NSC Alliance Washington Report may subscribe at www.NSCAlliance.org -- it's free!

If you have any questions or require additional information regarding any of the following items, please contact NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp at 202-628-1500 x 250 or at rgropp@aibs.org.

House Science Committee Advances COMPETES Reauthorization

On 22 April, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee passed a bill along party lines that would reauthorize funding for three federal programs that support basic research. The passage came after lengthy debate of 25 amendments.

“The America COMPETES Reauthorization Act” is sponsored by Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX), chair of the House Science Committee. HR 1806 would set new two-year funding goals for the National Science Foundation (NSF), Department of Energy research programs, and National Institute of Standards and Technology labs, as well as make policy changes within these programs.

Many of the amendments would have removed the most contentious provisions of the bill. Democrats unsuccessfully offered amendments to remove funding specifications for NSF's research directorates and to increase authorization levels for NSF education programs and operations.

Representative Paul Tonko (D-NY) commented that the bill should be called the “America Concedes Act” instead of the “America COMPETES Act” because the bill would cede the United States' global leadership in science and technology. Another member, Representative Eric Swalwell (D-CA) offered the alternate title “America Retreats Act.”

Chairman Smith responded that the legislation supports investments in areas of basic research that advance economic competitiveness. Smith justified the funding levels as necessary to stay within the budget caps mandated by federal law. Members of the minority party responded that the Budget Control Act does not specify cuts to particular federal programs. Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD) said the problem with sequestration is that it is a "sledgehammer, not a surgical knife."

HR 1806 proposes an authorization level of \$7.6 billion for NSF in fiscal years (FY) 2016 and 2017, which is \$253 million higher than the agency's current funding level, but lower than President Obama's budget request for FY 2016. The bill also specifies funding levels for each of NSF's directorates. For many years, Congress has not specified this level of detail in NSF's budget. If enacted, the reauthorization bill would benefit certain research areas—biology, computer science, engineering, and math and physical sciences—at the expense of the social sciences and geosciences.

In addition to the provisions debated during the committee markup, the legislation would make a number of changes to NSF policies. Research funded by NSF would have to be "in the national interest" and public announcement of each award would have to include a written justification. NSF would have to establish new procedures to ensure that research grants do not duplicate science funded by other federal agencies and that the principal investigators who receive multiple awards have sufficient resources to conduct the work. NSF would also have to justify the additional expenses of hiring rotating personnel. Additionally, new restrictions on the use of management fees for large facilities would be implemented.

Senate, House Chairmen Signal Intentions on COMPETES

In a joint statement, Senator John Thune (R-SD) and Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX) expressed their intention to work together to enact legislation reauthorizing the "America COMPETES Act." The pair are chairs of the Senate and House committees with oversight of several science agencies, including the National Science Foundation.

The chairmen plan to move reauthorization legislation this year. Legislative efforts last year failed, with the bill passed by the House Science Committee failing to be considered by the full chamber.

"There is bipartisan agreement that the federal government plays an important role in promoting scientific research, especially in the basic research that is foundational to discovery," stated the congressmen. "Our committees and the full Congress have an opportunity to ensure that the nation's research priorities advance scientific discoveries that fuel our innovation economy and are vital to continued U.S. economic security and competitiveness. We look forward to engaging with our colleagues, our constituents, and key stakeholders as this important effort moves ahead."

Senators Provide Bipartisan Support for Education Law Rewrite

The Senate panel responsible for education policy has unanimously approved a bill to rewrite the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” which has been known in recent years as No Child Left Behind.

The new legislation retains federal requirements for states to measure student achievement in certain subjects, including math and science. In addition, an amendment successfully offered by Senators Al Franken (D-MN), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and Patty Murray (D-WA) would provide states with funding to support partnerships between schools, businesses, universities, and non-profits to improve science education. States would have discretion in how to spend these funds, which could be used for activities ranging from teacher training and recruitment to supporting the participation of low-income students in science competitions.

NSC Alliance Member Recognized by National Science Board

The National Science Board will award the American Museum of Natural History with its 2015 Public Service Award. The award honors exemplary public service in promoting public understanding of science and engineering.

"Each year, the American Museum of Natural History shares the excitement and wonder of science with millions of students, teachers, families and other members of the public with its exhibitions and public programs," said Vint Cerf, chair of the board's Committee on Honorary Awards. "Additional initiatives of the museum contribute to the teaching and learning of science and the training of the next generation of scientists."

The American Museum of Natural History is a member of the Natural Science Collections Alliance.

"We live in a time when many of our most pressing problems and opportunities are science based, a time in which scientific advancement and science literacy are essential elements in our nation's continued leadership and key to a shared global future that is sustainable, responsible and peaceful," said Ellen V. Futter, president of the museum. "Museums like the American Museum of Natural History have an important role to play in this, and we are honored to be recognized by the National Science Board."

Workshop on Managing Natural History Collections Data

Arizona State University and iDigBio will host a workshop on 15-17 September 2015 on “Managing Natural History Collections Data for Global Discoverability.” The event will take place in Tempe, Arizona. The deadline to apply is 1 May. More information is available at <https://www.idigbio.org/content/managing-natural-history-collections-data-global-discoverability>.

Enter the Faces of Biology Photo Contest

The 5th Annual Faces of Biology Photo Contest is now open for submissions. The competition, sponsored by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS), recognizes scientists who use imagery to communicate aspects of biological research to the public and policymakers.

The theme of the contest is “Faces of Biology.” Photographs entered into the competition must depict a person, such as a scientist, technician, or student, engaging in biological research. The research may occur outside, in a lab, at a natural history collection, at a field station, on a computer, in a classroom, or anywhere else research is done.

The First Place Winner will have his/her winning photo featured on the cover of *BioScience*, and will receive \$250 and a one year membership in AIBS, including a subscription to *BioScience*. The Second and Third Place Winners will have his/her winning photo printed inside the journal, and will receive a one year membership in AIBS, including a subscription to *BioScience*.

The winning photo from the 2014 contest is featured on the cover of the May 2015 issue of *BioScience*.

Submissions must be received by 11:59:59 p.m. Eastern Time on 30 September 2015.

For more information or to enter the contest, visit <http://www.aibs.org/public-programs/photocontest.html>.

The Natural Science Collections Alliance is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit association that serves as an advocate for natural science collections, the institutions that preserve them, and the research and education that extend from them for the benefit of science, society, and stewardship of the environment. NSC Alliance members are part of an international community of museums, botanical gardens, herbariums, universities, and other institutions that house natural science collections and utilize them in research, exhibitions, academic and informal science education, and outreach activities. Website: www.NSCAlliance.org.

The NSC Alliance Washington Report is a publication of the NSC Alliance. For information about membership in the NSC Alliance, please contact spotter@aibs.org.