

To: Campus  
From: Office of Federal Relations  
Re: Update on COMPETES Act Reauthorization in House and Senate  
Date: May 26, 2015

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**House Activity**

As you will recall, in April the House Science Committee approved on a party line vote the latest version of comprehensive legislation to reauthorize the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), Department of Energy (DOE) basic and applied research programs, and federally funded STEM education programs. This bill is H.R. 1806, the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015. The authorizations for these programs expired at the end of FY 13.

The scientific and higher education communities universally [opposed](#) H.R. 1806. Among the most significant issues raised were:

- insufficient authorization levels overall and, in particular, flat funding for FY 17;
- significant cuts to the Geosciences and Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences directorates at NSF;
- significant cuts to renewable, environmental and climate change research at DOE;
- the two-year timeframe of the authorization; and
- several policy provisions that would fundamentally change the nature of basic research at these agencies.

In advance of House floor consideration, Vice Provost for Research Tim McNamara sent a letter (attached) to Tennessee's representatives in the U.S. House expressing Vanderbilt's opposition to H.R. 1806, and explaining how provisions within the bill might negatively impact research at Vanderbilt. Office of Federal Relations staff also communicated with congressional aides to convey Vanderbilt's concerns about the bill.

On May 20, H.R. 1806 was debated on the House floor. The bill ultimately passed the House by a vote of 217 to 205. The vote was largely party-line, with all of the Democrats who voted and 23 Republicans voting no. Our delegation split, as expected, along party lines with all 7 Republicans supporting the bill and Democratic Reps. Cooper and Cohen opposing it.

The House floor debate included consideration of twelve amendments. Among the amendments that passed were: an amendment to instruct NSF's I-Corps to support and invest in female entrepreneurs; an amendment to authorize the Energy Innovation Hubs Program within DOE; and an amendment that increased funding for the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partnership by decreasing funding for DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. Among the amendments that failed were: a

Democratic substitute for the entire bill; an amendment to strike a controversial provision requiring that all NSF grants be certified as being in the “national interest”; an amendments to remove alterations to the statutory goals of the Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy (ARPA-E); and an amendment to remove added restrictions to the activities of DOE’s Office of Biological and Environmental Research.

### **Senate Activity**

In the Senate, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) introduced a bill to reauthorize the energy title of COMPETES on May 20. He was joined by a bipartisan group of senators including Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Sen. Cory Gardner (D-CO), Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), and Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-NM). This legislation includes a five year authorization for both the Department of Energy’s Office of Science and ARPA-E, with funding for both increasing about 4 percent annually, for a total increase of approximately 22 percent over five years for each. Sen. Alexander’s press release on the bill is [here](#). Upon introduction of the bill, Alexander stated, "Governing is about setting priorities, and this legislation will put us on a path to double basic energy research -- one of the best ways to keep good-paying jobs from going overseas -- while streamlining basic energy research programs at the U.S. Department of Energy." Alexander’s bill is expected to be incorporated into a larger energy package being developed by Energy & Natural Resources Chair Murkowski.

Regarding the NSF title of COMPETES in the Senate, it is our understanding that Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) and Sen. Gardner will be working together to take the lead on drafting the NSF portion of the COMPETES bill.