May 8, 2013

Honorable Lamar Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Science and Technology  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Science and Technology  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Johnson:

We are aware of the draft legislation entitled, *the High Quality Research Act* and your April 25th request to NSF for “detailed information on specific research projects” – including “the detailed scientific/technical reviews” of specific proposals.

We believe that this draft bill and the request to the Foundation will have a chilling and detrimental impact on the merit-based review process and the participation of an estimated 60,000 of the world’s most outstanding researchers and educators with relevant scientific and technical expertise who voluntarily assist the Nation by reviewing proposals submitted to the Foundation. The Nation’s reliance on the current merit-based system has helped ensure that the precious resources invested in science, technology, and education contribute to America’s world-class research enterprise. We respectfully request that you rescind the April 25, 2013 letter and keep this draft bill from ever coming up for a vote or from being incorporated in other legislation.

We believe that this draft legislation would replace the current merit-based system used to evaluate research and education proposals with a cumbersome and unrealistic certification process that rather than improving the quality of research would do just the opposite. The history of science and technology has shown that truly basic research often yields breakthroughs – including new technologies, markets and jobs – but that it is impossible to predict which projects (and which fields) will do that. Progress in science requires freedom to explore important questions regardless of where the answers may lead. Over the years, federal funding of basic research, using peer review evaluation, has led to vast improvements in health care, national security, and economic development.

The NSF, the National Science Board, and the Congress have regularly examined the merit review process and adjusted it, periodically, after widespread consultation with all parties concerned. One of the more recent changes was to elevate the importance of assessing the broader impacts of the proposed project on a par with assessing the scientific and technical merit. We believe this approach serves to strengthen the merit-based decision making process the Foundation uses for individual research projects.
We respectfully ask that the Committee consider our views and forego any further action on the process envisioned in this draft legislation and the request contained in the April 25th letter to the Foundation.

Sincerely,

Neal Lane
Director, National Science Foundation
1993-1998

Richard N. Zare
Chairman, National Science Board
1996-1998

Arden Bement
Director, National Science Foundation
2004-2010

Steven C. Beering
Chairman, National Science Board
2006-2010

Rita Colwell
Director, National Science Foundation
1998-2004

Warren Washington
Chairman, National Science Board
2002-2006