

April 21, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chair, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2318 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Member, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2318 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

The Union of Concerned Scientists strongly opposes H.R. 1806, the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015.

As drafted, H.R. 1806 raises significant policy concerns that would have an overall negative impact on science and would make it even more difficult for federal agencies to protect public health and the environment. The legislation even goes so far as to prevent federal agencies from using the best available science as they carry out their respective missions.

While the bill is problematic on multiple fronts, the following provisions would severely undermine the scientific enterprise across the federal government:

- The bill appears to ban the Department of Energy Office of Science's Biological and Environmental Research (BER) program from conducting climate science research if the Government Accountability Office (GAO) finds that the research is "overlapping or duplicative" with research being conducted by other federal entities. While we agree that federal researchers should coordinate their efforts, there is a strong scientific value in independent research and the replication of results, as this committee has noted in the past. GAO itself has noted research that is "duplicative" can still have significant value.
- The bill appears to dictate what scientific research has the most promise for the national interest by instructing the Director of the BER program to "prioritize fundamental research on biological systems and genomics science." The director of the BER program should retain the authority to prioritize research based on an independent merit-based process to determine which opportunities are the most fruitful.

- H.R. 1806 demonstrates a short-sighted view of critical research that is done in our national laboratory system by appearing to ban any federal agency from using the “results of any research, development, demonstration, or commercial application projects or activities” conducted by the Department of Energy regarding fossil fuels for “regulatory assessments or determinations.” Some of the most up-to-date research that is publicly available would be unavailable to federal regulatory agencies charged with protecting public health and the environment. This provision not only will waste scant federal resources, but it will make American families more vulnerable to the harmful impacts of fossil fuel use and exploration.

Furthermore, this version of America COMPETES fundamentally decreases the nation’s capacity to compete internationally on energy research and development. By setting authorizations at numbers well below recent appropriated levels for key basic research and applied energy programs at the Department of Energy, the bill decreases America’s ability to do the research and development that is critical to our energy future. It is also very disappointing that the bill eliminates authorizations for advanced transportation technologies that are critical to reducing oil consumption and shielding consumers from volatile oil prices.

While supporters of this bill may suggest that they are supporting science, this flawed legislation simply adds additional constraints on agencies while redirecting and/or decreasing critical funds.

Unfortunately, what should be a bipartisan legislative undertaking includes some of the recurring partisan attacks undermining science that are becoming commonplace in the House, many of which will further obstruct technological advancement. Legislation that is supposed to maintain the nation’s leadership on science and energy research is now being reauthorized in a manner that actively undermines our ability to do just that. We strongly urge you to not report this bill out of committee.

Sincerely,



Andrew A. Rosenberg, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Science and Democracy
Union of Concerned Scientists



Michelle Robinson
Director, Clean Vehicles Program
Union of Concerned Scientists