



29 June 2016

The Honorable John Thune  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and  
Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and  
Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cory Gardner  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and  
Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Gary Peters  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and  
Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Senators Gardner and Peters:

Representing the nation's leading ocean science and technology institutions (academic, corporate, and aquaria), we are writing to commend the Committee on their American Innovation and Competitiveness Act (S. 3084). The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee has historically been a bipartisan champion for the development and support of our nation's science enterprise. Working in tandem with the science community, the Committee has strived to reach shared goals and has provided the resources necessary to achieve those goals. We greatly appreciate the Committee's leadership in supporting federal research over the years and share the desire to ensure that public funds are invested wisely so that research can improve the quality of life of Americans for generations to come.

The United States has led the world in innovation for the past 60 years through the academic-federal partnership based on competitive peer review processes. This bill reaffirms commitment to the basics of our nation's gold-standard science process – intellectual merit-based review and peer review -- while forging into the future of science by incorporating novel science staffing and funding methods (e.g., citizen science and prize competitions). S. 3084 seeks to maintain the successful components of our federal science program (e.g., EPSCoR), address issues raised by the scientific community (e.g., administrative burden), outline clear federal policy (e.g., science conferences), improve federal oversight (e.g., large facilities), and expand the demographics of STEM (e.g., broadening participation and inclusion). Below, we highlight some of the most important components of the bill that will ensure our nation's growth and competitiveness in science and innovation.

***Title I: Maximizing Investments Basic Research***

*Sec. 101.* The ocean science and technology community appreciates the Committee's backing of peer review and intellectual merit for the basis of grant proposal review criteria.

*Sec. 102.* The community notes that the Senate bill doesn't require that the project be in the "national interest" but does require that the abstract clearly (for the layman) state how the project relates to the NSF mission, identifies the research priorities, and is publically available at the time of the award. Ocean scientists agree with the Committee's goal of making science more approachable and understandable to those outside of the field.

*Sec. 107.* The NIST Director is directed to develop a strategic plan for laboratory programs that “prioritizes interactions with academia ... and industry; and optimizes commercial and industrial applications.” The ocean science and technology community appreciates the specific inclusion of academia and industry.

*Sec. 110.* The Committee directs NSF to evaluate existing and future needs of and to develop a strategic plan to address projects that fall between Major Research Instrumentation and Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction. Ocean scientists applaud the Committee’s efforts to address projects that fall into this gap and hope to see report language specifically addressing midscale research (as most of the subsection address instrumentation, equipment, and construction).

*Sec. 111.* The pre-award analysis exception proposed by the Committee is lauded by the community as it reduces duplicative auditing at organizations and institutions having recently gone through such process. Additionally, the construction oversight requiring “periodic external reviews” of project management and performance allows for the agency’s best judgement to be used in terms of timing. In the same vein, the incurred cost audit timing being based on risk analysis and length of the award also allows for timing to be based on each project and the agency’s judgement. This section focuses on clarifying components of the major research facility projects, which will increase transparency as well as decrease potential differences in expectations. The congressional briefing required on oversight implementation progress seems to be looking backward, however. As the goal of this section is to move ahead based on these clarified components, the briefings should be based on the implementation of this section (rather than issues of the last five years which may or may not have instigated these clarifications in the first place). The forward-looking actions of this section can strengthen relationships between the Foundation and their partners.

*Sec. 113.* We agree with the Committee to keep management of the Antarctic program with NSF and to investigate ways to sustain and strengthen those scientific efforts.

### ***Title II: Administrative Burdens and Regulatory Reductions***

*Sec. 201.* We would like to commend the Committee for proposing the establishment of a working group to examine regulations of federally-supported research. The inclusion of stakeholder feedback and recommendations, including from researchers and institutions of higher learning, non-profit research institutions (and their representative associations), scientific associations, and industry, will enable the robust review and discussion of administrative burden. This will allow for the substantive changes necessary to return our scientists to their research. Ocean Leadership members look forward to being part of the consultation.

*Sec. 202.* The exchange of ideas and information is a critical component of the scientific enterprise and occurs largely at conferences, symposia, and workshops. Ocean Leadership agrees with the Committee’s policy “to encourage the broad dissemination of federal research findings and engagement of federal researchers with the scientific and technical community.” The participation of all scientists, whether they be federal, academic, industry, or otherwise, is key to successful distribution and collaboration in science.

### ***Title III: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Education***

*Sec. 303.* In this country’s foremost authorizing bill for the science enterprise, we are heartened to see the inclusion of one oft-overlooked science mission agency – NOAA. We are pleased to see NOAA joining NSF, NASA, and the Department of Education to appoint academic institutions, industry, non-profit organizations, and informal education practitioners as members in the STEM Education Advisory Panel. Providing CoSTEM with a collaborative advisory panel will strengthen their efforts to coordinate federal programs and activities in support of STEM education.

*Secs. 305-308.* The ocean science community appreciates the Committee's dedication to inclusion in science and echoes their desire to have broader participation from women, minorities, and people with disabilities. The grant programs to expand STEM opportunities proposed in Section 305 of S. 3084 should be broadened in eligibility. Specifically, the program should address the gap between education and profession by making the grants allowable for seminars, workshops, and online portals dedicated to bringing applicable students together with industry and government seeking these STEM graduates. Additionally, to better foster inclusion in STEM professions, these grants should also be permitted for leadership training programs for graduate school graduates of these under-represented groups of junior STEM professionals.

***Title IV: Leveraging the Private Sector***

*Sec. 402.* The Committee's support of and encouragement for utilizing citizen science methodologies is appreciated by the ocean science community.

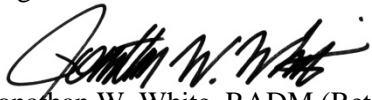
***Title VI: Innovation, Commercialization, and Technology Transfer***


*Sec. 601.* The Innovation Corps is a great pathway for understanding technology needs and for creating academic-industry partnerships to help guide workforce development. The ocean science and technology community applauds the Committee's support of this program.

*Sec. 602.* Additionally, we agree with the Committee's support of commercialization of federally-funded research and technologies. Specifically, we are pleased that academia, as well as non-profits partnered with an institution of higher education, are eligible for commercialization grants.

We are encouraged by the Committee's continued dedication to the national science enterprise. We welcome the opportunity to work with you in sustaining and strengthening the strong science framework necessary to facilitate discovery and innovation while nurturing and training the next generation of scientists and supporting our nation's economic and national security. These efforts are crucial to keeping America competitive.

Regards,

  
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President and CEO  
Consortium for Ocean Leadership

  
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President  
National Association of Marine Laboratories