



CONSORTIUM *of* SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## COSSA Statement on the Scientific Research in the National Interest Act (H.R. 3293)

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) commends the National Science Foundation (NSF) for its ongoing efforts to articulate the benefits of the research it funds, across all scientific fields, to the national interest of the United States. We agree that researchers supported by federal dollars must be accountable to taxpayers and that the work supported by NSF should be in the nation's interest. However, we object to political interference in the determination of "what is worthwhile science in the national interest." The *Scientific Research in the National Interest Act* (H.R. 3293), introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on July 29, 2015, would challenge NSF's ability to nimbly respond to the ever-changing demands of science and to support the very best research across all disciplines without political intrusion. To quote the recent remarks of a senior official at a leading U.S. research university, "Outstanding science in any field is in the national interest."

The language in H.R. 3293 was derived from the *America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015* (H.R. 1803), a bill to which COSSA has joined the broader scientific community in strong opposition. That bill sought to arbitrarily pick winners and losers among the scientific fields based solely on "political review," sidestepping NSF's current practice for prioritizing research investments that relies on technical experts working at NSF, a world-renown and highly regarded merit review process, and countless scholars housed at universities and laboratories across the country. While H.R. 3293 states, "Nothing in this section shall be construed as altering the Foundation's intellectual merit or broader impacts criteria for evaluating grant applications," the bill seeks to codify a definition of "national interest" that could be interpreted in ways that would do just that.

For example, the press release accompanying the introduction of H.R. 3293, released by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), Chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee and lead sponsor of the bill, calls out specific grants that he has determined to be unworthy of federal support—grants that were awarded as a result of NSF's rigorous merit review process, which the bill asserts to uphold. The U.S. scientific enterprise must remain insulated from political and ideological pressure if we are to encourage the most innovative science. Unfortunately, H.R. 3293 and the ongoing mischaracterization of meritorious research projects illustrate the intent of some to continue inserting political review into the NSF grant-making process.

Lastly, H.R. 3293 is duplicative of efforts already underway at NSF to better articulate the value of the research it funds. The agency has demonstrated its commitment to transparency with the launch of a new Transparency and Accountability Initiative in late 2013, and has since been engaging with the scientific community about its updated policies, practices, and expectations. Further, the National Science Board, which serves as the policy making body for NSF and independent advisor to the President of the United States and the Congress on issues of science policy, passed a resolution in May 2015 acknowledging NSF's efforts and stating it "strongly endorses the principle that all Foundation-funded research and education must further the national interest by contributing to the Foundation's mission" and "recognizes and supports the [NSF] Director's continuing efforts to ensure that all Foundation practices and awards reflect this principle."

The nature of basic science is to explore fundamental questions that may not have an immediate application, but that contribute to the scaffolding of knowledge that builds and progresses over time. This necessary, unending pursuit of new knowledge is what is in the national interest.

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*The Consortium of Social Science Associations is a nonprofit organization serving as a united voice for more than 100 professional associations, scientific societies, research centers and institutes, and colleges and universities who care about a robust social and behavioral scientific research enterprise.*

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