

The Honorable Lamar Smith, Chairman
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

21 May 2014

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

On behalf of the undersigned geoscience organizations and our tens of thousands of members – Earth scientists and universities advancing scientific research for the good of our nation and world – we urge you recognize that investment in geoscience research is essential to the well-being and prosperity of the United States and its citizens.

Research funded by the National Science Foundation's Geosciences (GEO) Directorate provides invaluable knowledge on protecting American lives and infrastructure from tornados, hurricanes, and other natural hazards, sustaining biological diversity and ocean resources, conserving soil and water for agricultural productivity, and finding and maintaining adequate supplies of minerals and natural resources. Our organizations believe the funding levels for the NSF GEO Directorate proposed in H.R. 4186 disregard the societal benefits of Earth and space science research by critically underfunding GEO to levels lower than those received during sequestration.

The Earth sciences are critical components of the overall science and technology enterprise and should be increased. NSF's Directorate for Geosciences supports approximately 65 percent of all basic university research in the geosciences. NSF provides the largest federal support for Earth science research regarding land, mineral, energy, public safety and water resources – helping to assure basic needs at home are met and the U.S. maintains its competitiveness in the world. This Directorate regularly receives a large number of exciting research proposals that are highly rated for both their scientific merit and their broader impacts; the funding rate for research grants dropped to 23 percent last year, leaving many meritorious projects unfunded.

The America COMPETES Acts of 2007 and 2010 provided the necessary foundation to maintain the United States' worldwide leadership in Earth science research, and now is the time for Congress to build on those efforts for the next several years, by continuing to recognize the value of the geosciences, such as:

- Natural hazards research that improves our understanding of earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, and landslides, and will allow for better planning and mitigation in these areas that will reduce future losses.
- Earth resources research, which contributes to a better understanding of the natural distribution and uses of mineral and energy resources that are essential to modern civilization.
- Research on water resources, including improving and addressing major gaps in our understanding of water availability, quality, and dynamics.
- Weather and atmospheric research that helps save lives and property by allowing continual improvement in forecasting, tracking, and warning for severe weather events.

For these reasons, we oppose the cuts to the NSF GEO Directorate in H.R. 4168. However, we remain committed to working with the House Science Committee to pass a reauthorization bill for the federal science agencies that aligns with the objectives of the America COMPETES Acts of 2007 and 2010 and the needs and goals of the U.S. scientific enterprise.

America's economic competitiveness, public safety, and national security depend on our commitment to invest in the Earth sciences. Our organizations urge you to modify the FIRST Act of 2014 and set forth a vision to spur science innovation and growth and recognize the vital role of the geosciences in achieving this mandate.

Sincerely,

American Association of Petroleum Geologists
American Geophysical Union
American Geosciences Institute
Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography
Association of Environmental & Engineering Geologists
Geological Society of America
National Ground Water Association
Seismological Society of America
Society for Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration, Inc.

Cc: House Science Committee Membership