June 5, 2015

Senator Mitch McConnell Senator Harry Reid
Majority Leader Minority Leader
United States Senate United States Senate

Senator John Cornyn Senator Dick Durbin
Majority Whip Assistant Minority Leader
United States Senate United States Senate

Senator Lamar Alexander Senator Patty Murray
Chairman Ranking Member
United States Senate United States Senate

Senator Lisa Murkowski Senator Maria Cantwell
Chairman Ranking Member
United States Senate United States Senate

Senator John Thune Bill Nelson
Chairman Ranking Member
United States Senate United States Senate

Senator Cory Gardner Senator Gary Peters
United States Senate United States Senate

Senator Christopher Coons
United States Senate

Dear Senators:

The Task Force on American Innovation, a coalition of businesses and business organizations, scientific societies, and university organizations that advocates for robust funding for scientific research at key federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy (DOE), and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), writes to express our views on the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act. We also write to express the Task Force’s support for S. 1398, introduced recently by Senators Lamar Alexander and Chris Coons.

This coalition strongly believes that our nation’s global leadership in innovation enhances its strategic advantage, powers the economy, strengthens our competitiveness, and improves Americans’ quality of life. Based on the groundbreaking report, Rising Above the Gathering Storm, the COMPETES Act, enacted in 2007 and reauthorized in 2010 under a Republican and then a Democratic President, established a national vision for scientific research and innovation with the goal of maintaining our nation’s global leadership role. As competitor nations are increasing their investments in scientific research, the U.S. would benefit greatly from research. Placing a low priority on research will lead to an innovation deficit, and compromise our role as the global innovation leader.
As the Senate seeks to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act, we believe such legislation should:

- make a strong statement that sustained, robust funding across all disciplines of basic scientific research is a top national priority, without forcing damaging tradeoffs among fields of science;

- set targets that provide for steady and sustained real growth in funding for all of the major federal research agencies covered by the legislation (the National Science Foundation, key agencies and programs at the Department of Energy, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology);

- within the context of strong federal support for basic research, ensure that federal science agencies, guided by their scientific advisory committees and boards, continue to set priorities for funding within and among the full range of science disciplines.

S. 1398 is a strong model for a COMPETES reauthorization bill. While it covers research programs only at the Department of Energy, it makes clear that the nation needs strong, sustained investment in scientific research. The Task Force on American Innovation supports this legislation.

While we understand the need to control long-term budget deficits and debt, sequestration-level spending caps under the Budget Control Act have made it extremely difficult to address national priorities such as scientific research, which actually lead to new technologies and advancements that grow the economy. We hope Congress and the President will agree on budget measures that provide the resources needed for investments in research. Regardless, it is important that COMPETES continue to stand as a signpost of our nation’s commitment to investment in the discoveries and ideas upon which we build new technologies and develop solutions to our most pressing challenges. We look forward to working with you on these critical issues to maintain America's global innovation leadership.

Sincerely,

Task Force on American Innovation