



Association of American Geographers

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Douglas Richardson

October 7, 2014

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the Association of American Geographers (AAG), I am writing to express our concern with your investigations related to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) merit-review process. The Foundation has a lengthy and proven record of effectively funding groundbreaking research that has helped make the United States the world's leader in innovation, and it is my firm belief that questioning individual grants – while perhaps well intentioned – undermines our nation's scientific endeavor and makes young Americans reticent to pursue careers in critical STEM fields.

In reviewing the letters you have sent to the NSF seeking information on particular grants, we have noticed that several of the grants you are examining have been funded fully or in part by the Foundation's Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS) Program. The GSS program supports critical investments in human geography studies, in addition to research in the physical and environmental sciences. It also funds research on geospatial science and technologies, such as geographic information systems (GIS) and global positioning systems (GPS), that are transforming and improving the American economy, creating jobs throughout our society, and making the U.S. more competitive internationally.

The AAG has received the support of 24 bipartisan governors; 26 Fortune 500 companies; and many other prominent individuals and organizations through their endorsement of a resolution urging greater federal funding for geography and geospatial education – and this support would likely transfer to research funding for these critical fields (please see the enclosed "AAG Resolution Supporting K-12 Geography Education"). Furthermore, the comparative regional and international research funded through GSS is imperative to our understanding of the uncertain world we live in – especially as we face numerous challenging situations that require our attention in nearly every part of the globe.

There can be no doubt that in this time of budget challenges, our resources must be carefully invested. Yet, federal funding for basic research has been stagnant, which is a trend that must be reversed. As we strive to encourage American students to pursue careers in science and technology disciplines, our political leaders should stress the value

of interdisciplinarity and the full range of scientific studies – not question the wisdom of particular grants that have been awarded through NSF’s highly-regarded merit-review system.

The AAG is a nonprofit scientific, research, and educational society with a current membership of over 10,500 individuals from more than 60 countries. Our members are geographers and related professionals who work in the public, private, and academic sectors to advance the theory, methods, and practice of geography. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions about these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Douglas Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Douglas Richardson, PhD
Executive Director