



1001 G Street, N.W. _ Suite 900 East _ Washington, D.C. 20001
202/879-9384 _ FAX _ 202/393 5510 _ www.sciencecoalition.org

September 1, 2006

Memorandum

To: Editorial writers

From: The Science Coalition

Re: **Congress's unfinished business includes advancing American competitiveness**

Of the many items remaining on Congress's legislative agenda before it adjourns for the 2006 elections, advancing American competitiveness should be a top priority. Both houses of Congress have approved important increases in funding for key federal agencies -- the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Office of Science at the U.S. Department of Energy, and the National Institute of Standards in Technology (NIST) at the U.S. Department of Commerce -- but none of the appropriation bills containing these programs has been sent to the President to sign into law. These federal funding bills represent the first steps in enacting the recommendations contained in President Bush's American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI) outlined in his State of the Union address and presented in his FY2007 federal budget submission to Congress. The goals for federal investment in basic science research are also contained in the product of a number of blue-ribbon commissions and panels, including the U.S. National Academies of Science and the Council on Competitiveness.

Once signed into law, these proposals will help secure our nation's stake in its innovation future. In particular, the proposals to double the funding for these important federal research functions will do two important things: 1.) Fund the discoveries that will fuel the next generation of ideas and 2.) Help produce the "best and brightest" scientists to turn those ideas into technology and products to power our economy and enhance our quality of life.

The House and Senate should also pass important legislative packages that will shore up our country's competitiveness by boosting math and science education at all levels. Champions of science in government from both parties and from around the nation have taken action. They have produced initiatives supporting recommendations of experts from academia, industry and government to prepare our nation for the many challenges it faces to compete in the global economy of the future. **We encourage you to examine these reports and proposals as you consider the many issues about which you inform your reading public.**

- The U.S. Senate, guided by the leadership of Senators Domenici (R-NM), Alexander (R-TN), Bingaman (D-NM), and Mikulski (D-MD) has under consideration a series of three bills called PACE (Protecting America's Competitive Edge). These Senators have already garnered the support of more than 60 members of the Senate. One piece of this legislative package has advanced, yet two other bills are languishing in Senate Committees. The PACE package seeks to address several issues reported by the National Academy of Sciences in its landmark study "*Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*," <http://darwin.nap.edu/books/0309100399/html>.

- U.S. Senators Ensign (R-NV) and Lieberman (D-CT) along with 23 co-sponsors from both parties introduced S.2109, the National Innovation Act, in December of 2005. This bill seeks to enact the recommendations of the National Innovation Initiative produced by the Council on Competitiveness <http://www.compete.org/>. The bill has been referred to the Senate Finance Committee, but has not advanced.
- U.S. House Science Committee members led by Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) have passed three bills to strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness by improving math and science education and research for existing K-12 and undergraduate education programs at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Department of Energy (DOE) <http://www.house.gov/science>. These bills have been placed on the House calendar for consideration, and we urge the House leadership to schedule them for a vote as soon as possible.
- A bipartisan majority of the nation's governors, under the leadership of Mitt Romney (R-MA) and Jennifer Granholm (D-MI), has publicly urged the President and the Congress to increase funding for research, recognizing the tremendous impact the investment can have on local, as well as national, economies. (Their letter is available at www.sciencecoalition.org).

Important themes to be considered in this debate are:

1. **America must continue to be the innovation nation.** With the many challenges we face within our own borders and as a world leader, we cannot afford to stop pushing the frontiers of discovery. We can only do that by committing to a long-term strategy that insures that the next generation has the skills that they need to compete in the global economy. This strategy will grow our nation's intellectual capital, fueling innovation, entrepreneurship, and jobs.
2. **The new ideas that will create the industries and jobs of the future will come from investments our nation makes in research today.** Twenty years ago, no one would have envisioned the robust biotech and other technology-based industries that are now a hallmark of American innovation. These are examples of how university research, fueled by federal investment, can spawn new industries that create jobs while saving and enhancing lives in the U.S. and around the globe.
3. **While treating and curing disease are prominent examples of the fruits of science research, strategies to meet our nation's other challenges – energy independence, homeland and international security, and others – can also benefit from a significant investment in science across the board.** Barriers between scientific fields are now routinely being broken down, as advances in one field are applied to others – sometimes, in fact, creating entirely new disciplines. Studies on the interaction of light with atoms in physics and optical science, along with other research that led to the development of the laser, are responsible for the creation of the field of nuclear fusion, whose potential in creating energy is not yet completely known.
4. **Innovation is an indelible part of our national character that should be nurtured and supported.** We have been a world leader in science and engineering because our culture embraces creativity and opportunity, fueling invention and the risk taking to turn invention into new industry and jobs. In order to continue fostering talent from within our borders and attracting the best and brightest from around the world to our academic institutions and industries, we need to address the critical warning signs that are threatening our future stake on leadership in innovation.
5. **Every American has a stake in advancing a national innovation agenda.** Innovation is not abstract – its other translations are jobs, health and security. A successful national innovation strategy will have an impact on every family with a member suffering from a disease, looking for employment, or sending a child to school. The leaders from business, the federal and

state governments and the academic community who have dedicated so much time to wrestling with these issues deserve our thanks and support.

Please contact Missi Tessier at The Science Coalition (tessier@podestamattoon.com, 202 879-9384) for further information.

The Science Coalition is an alliance of more than 400 organizations, institutions and individuals, run by public and private universities and including Nobel Laureates, businesses, voluntary health organizations, medical groups, healthcare providers, and scientific societies -- dedicated to sustaining the federal government's historic commitment to U.S. leadership in basic science.