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

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The American Anthropological Association (AAA) has serious concerns over the unwarranted repackaging of Section 106 of the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806), which once again seeks to inhibit legitimate research through the determination of what is “worthwhile science in the national interest.”

We are mindful that researchers must be accountable for the federal dollars that support us. We also believe, however, that it is ill-advised for Congress to exert political pressure and impose a “selection of science” based on something other than scientific merit.

Anthropological research serves the national interest by helping achieve a more just and sustainable society, and the need for such research has never been greater. Because of the work of anthropologists, heritage and languages are preserved, school systems are improved, lives are saved through public health interventions, environmental resources are managed more effectively, and a culture of innovation is better understood. These important contributions are only possible when researchers are able to pursue open-ended inquiry and held accountable for rigorous consideration of ideas through the self-correcting mechanisms of scholarly exchange, peer review, and the like.

We call on the Congress not to lower its expectations about what constitutes science in the national interest, but to allow the National Science Foundation to set its directorates’ priorities through its highly regarded merit review process – which is the envy of the world.

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