June 4, 2015

AAA Statement on the House FY 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) has historically spurred the development of a strong national science and technology enterprise by working with the scientific community to create a shared vision for the future and supporting strong and sustained funding to reach these goals. However, the latest CJS appropriations bill, as passed by the House Appropriations Committee on May 20th, now appears to undermine that commitment.

Under the current circumstances, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) opposes the bill and has deep concerns with the direction it is taking. Founded in 1902, AAA is the world’s largest professional anthropology organization, with more than 9,500 members dedicated to advancing human understanding and addressing the world's most pressing problems.

Specifically, the bill seeks to prioritize funding for specific scientific fields at the expense of the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE) and Geosciences Directorate (GEO). The bill arbitrarily directs 70% of NSF’s research funding to non-SBE and non-GEO sciences, thereby sidestepping NSF’s highly regarded merit review process – which is the envy of the world – and ushering in a political process that picks winners and losers among the scientific disciplines.

We certainly agree that federal operations must be mindful of current fiscal conditions, but we believe it is better advised to have qualified scientists, and not the Congress determine which categories of science funding should be increased and which should be cut. Therefore, we strongly urge Members of Congress to allow the NSF to decide its own directorate funding and oppose the FY 2016 House CJS Appropriations bill in its current form.

It is our hope that, under your leadership, a strong appropriations bill for the nation’s science agencies will again set forth a robust vision to maintain our leadership in science and technology. Simply put, it is vital to our nation’s future.

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