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On May 21, 2013, the majority staff of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held an open discussion with members of the scientific community to provide information on the draft High Quality Research Act. The committee hoped to address concerns, resolve misconceptions, and take suggestions for improvement.

The majority staff member stated that the act was leaked to the public while still in draft form and that, at that time, he had not been prepared to discuss the draft. According to the staff member, the draft had been sent to the Democratic members for consultation and input, contrary to some claims. The bill is aimed, he stated, at the funding level and is “not touching” the merit review process for approving grants. He argued that the bill’s intent was to add a layer of accountability by requiring that the National Science Foundation (NSF) director, or someone they designate, to approve the final funding of a grant. He indicated that this approval would be based on a short summary of why the peer review panel believed the grant should be funded and would not be “overly burdensome.” He also clarified that duplicative research referred only to preventing funding of the exact same grant proposal by multiple agencies.

The discussion focused mainly on explaining intent, but there were few suggestions on improving the draft. Additionally, the staff member did not indicate that any changes had been made to the original draft. The discussion appeared to do little to assuage the concerns and objections of the members of the scientific community present.

Currently, the draft legislation from Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) would require that the NSF director certify that each funded study benefits the nation’s “health, prosperity, or welfare, and...national defense;” be of the highest quality; be “ground breaking;” resolve issues of the “utmost importance to society at large;” and not duplicate other federally funded research. The draft has received significant backlash from the Committee Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), former NSF directors and assistant directors, 110 scientific organizations, and members of the broader scientific community.
