

## Senate committee passes bill restricting agency conference travel

July 30, 2014

The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee approved the Conference Accountability Act of 2014 to limit the travel of federal employees to conferences. The committee passed the bill, S. 1347, introduced by Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK), on July 30 by voice vote. Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI) voted “No.” Dozens of scientific societies announced their opposition to the bill in a letter sent to the committee leadership.

The bill would cap the number of federal employees from one agency allowed to attend any single international conference at 50 people. The head of the agency and the chief financial officer (CFO) would be able to grant exemptions cap if they certify to Congress that the employees’ attendance is in the national interest. The bill also limits an agency’s spending on a single conference to \$500,000 unless the CFO and agency head submit an exception to Congress.

S. 1347 would require agencies to post information every quarter regarding conferences attended by agency employees, including details such as itemized expenses. If an agency spends over \$50,000 on a conference they must provide a cost-benefit analysis of holding a conference rather than conducting a teleconference. Sen. Levin said the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), an expert agency in cost-benefit analyses, does not know how to conduct these analyses for every conference. Sen. Levin opposed the bill saying that it is overly burdensome and costly.

The American Geosciences Institute (AGI) and 12 of its member societies signed on to the letter opposing the S. 1347 travel restrictions. The scientific societies say conferences create “global awareness of research advances,” allow “rapid dissemination of federally funded research results,” and foster collaboration. They say this bill endangers these conference outcomes and increases administrative costs.

The full Senate could consider this legislation when they return from recess in September.

Sources: [Congress.gov](http://Congress.gov), Ecological Society of America, Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

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