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On April 22, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee passed the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015 (H.R. 1806) with a party-line vote. The bill would set authorized spending levels for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the Department of Energy's (DOE) research programs. The bill would authorize \$7.6 billion for NSF, a 4 percent increase overall, as well as an 8 percent increase for NIST, and a 5 percent increase for the DOE Office of Science. The bill authorizes NSF funding for each directorate, a departure from the current process of allowing NSF and the National Science Board to determine each directorate's funding. Furthermore, it would authorize cuts to NSF funding for the Geosciences Directorate (GEO) by 8 percent and the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE) by 45 percent, despite the overall increase in authorized funding for NSF.

Democratic members strongly opposed the bill, offering 25 amendments intended to restore funding levels for geosciences, climate science, applied energy research, and social, behavioral, and economic sciences, all of which failed mostly along party-line votes. Space Subcommittee Ranking Member Donna Edwards (D-MD) expressed her frustration with the bill, calling the cuts to science and education irresponsible.

Amendments that passed, mostly along party lines, include support for alternative fusion research, support for diversity of states receiving NSF funds, and authorization for DOE's Energy Frontier Research Centers. Representative Eric Swalwell's (D-CA) amendment stating that climate change is real passed with bipartisan support after it was amended by Chairman Smith to remove language saying human activity was a significant contributor. Representatives Jim Bridenstine (R-OK) and Randy Weber (R-TX) were the sole nay votes against the amendment.

H.R. 1806 will move on for consideration by the full House. The House and Senate have both pledged to pass reauthorization legislation for energy and science research programs during this Congress.

Source: E&E News, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
