



Statement on NSF Budget Amendment

The U.S. Congress has approved a spending bill to fund government activities for the rest of the current fiscal year (2013). That bill included an amendment proposed by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) that sets restrictions on NSF funding of research in political science, by requiring the Director of the agency to write a justification for each award specifying that the research proposed "promotes national security or the economic interests of the U.S." This is not something required of any other program and requires a level of micro-management that is inappropriate for the Director of the agency.

The Linguistic Society of America (LSA) holds that the NSF is a well-run and very productive government agency, which has funded much research that has been innovative and extremely advantageous for the country. It is much praised and much imitated by science funding agencies around the world and brings kudos to the U.S. Its success is due in large degree to its independence, particularly its independence from political and commercial influence, and to its deep engagement with the broad scientific community. Its peer review system is effective and is itself subject to review by the scientific community at several levels. Individual awards pass the scrutiny of experts in the field, who write referee reports on particular proposals or serve on panels that typically meet twice a year. Individual programs are subject to the review of Committees of Visitors every three years. Directorates are open to advice from their Advisory Committees that meet every six months and the whole agency works under the guidance of the National Science Board, whose members are appointed by the President and meet eight times a year. There is also much discussion between the NSF and Congressional offices every week.

Given the success of NSF, it is dangerous for individual politicians to undermine the peer review system that operates at so many levels and to seek to effectively eliminate programs without scientific review. This is no way to run a science agency and adds to the concerns voiced when the House Majority Leader, Rep. Eric Cantor, first set up his website <http://majorityleader.gov/YouCut/> by inviting members of the public to indicate what scientific research projects should be de-funded, a procedure that is open to much abuse.

We urge Congress to respect the way that NSF has earned its reputation and to allow the familiar review mechanisms to work freely, immune from the scientific preferences of individual Congressional representatives. And we urge members of the LSA to contact their representatives and communicate the increasing dangers to the integrity of government science funding.

Approved by the LSA Executive Committee, April 5, 2013