March 31, 2014

The Honorable Lamar Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

On behalf of the members of the Task Force on American Innovation, an alliance of America's most innovative companies, leading research universities, and largest scientific societies, we are writing to express our strong concern with funding levels contained in the Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) Act (H.R. 4186), recently voted out of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee. The current version of the FIRST Act does not authorize adequate levels of investment in scientific research that are needed to close the nation’s innovation deficit and sustain our global leadership position in science and innovation.

The Task Force on American Innovation strongly supported the 2007 COMPETES Act, its reauthorization in 2010, and Rising Above the Gathering Storm, the National Academies report that inspired the legislation. That is why the Task Force joined business and academic leaders and numerous other organizations in endorsing the Guiding Principles for the America COMPETES Act Reauthorization delivered to Capitol Hill in July of 2013. The FIRST Act, as currently written, falls short of these principles, and of the COMPETES Act itself.

The FIRST Act contains a number of other provisions that many Task Force members believe contradict or are inconsistent with the Guiding Principles referenced above. This letter focuses on research funding because that is our primary mission. We are not taking a specific collective position on other portions of the bill.

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This Task Force was initiated by technology companies ten years ago based on a recognition that (1) federal funding of basic research was critical to the nation’s long-term economic strength and national security; (2) federal research spending, particularly in the non-biomedical arena, was seriously lagging behind the nation’s investment needs; and (3) these things were occurring at a time when rising economies around the world in Europe and especially in Asia were beginning to pour resources into research funding in an effort to close the gap with the United States and eventually supplant our global leadership role.

A decade later, we have the very same concerns, except that they are magnified by the continuing erosion of federal support for research and the increasing speed at which other countries are developing their own scientific capacities. The FIRST Act in its current form does little to close our innovation deficit or address the competitiveness threat. We are eager to work with you and your Committee to amend the legislation to provide sufficient funding to help achieve those ends.

Sincerely,

Task Force on American Innovation

CC: Members of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology