



September 10, 2012

The Honorable John Holdren
Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20504

Dear Director Holdren:

We wish to bring to your attention some potential unintended consequences of the restrictions on conferences and travel expenses outlined in the pending GSA Act (H.R. 4631) as well as in amendments to the DATA Act (H.R. 2146) and the 21st Century Postal Reform Act (S. 1789).

We request that you consider exempting recognized scientific, technical and educational meetings from the proposed limits in these pieces of legislation. We also request an exemption for meetings of national and international standards bodies, as U.S. participation is critical to national economic interests.

We are four organizations committed to the strength of the computing field. The US Public Policy Council of ACM (USACM) is a community of technology experts representing ACM (the Association for Computing Machinery). ACM is a major technical and professional society involved in all aspects of computing and information technology. The Computing Research Association (CRA) is an association of more than 200 North American academic departments of computer science, computer engineering, and related fields; laboratories and centers in engaging in basic computing research; and affiliated professional societies. The Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM) is an international community with over 14,000 members from academia, industry, and government. Its members, from many different disciplines, have a common interest in applying mathematics in partnership with computational science towards solving real-world problems. The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, Inc. – USA (IEEE-USA) advances the public good and promotes the careers and public policy interests of 235,000 engineers, scientists and allied professionals who are U.S. members of IEEE. Each of our groups is dedicated to ensuring the strength and vitality of computing as well as the agencies and industries with which we interact.

We acknowledge the motivation behind these bills to prevent abuses and control expenses. The restrictions outlined in them, however, will curtail important professional interactions that take place during scientific conferences and meetings attended by federal scientists and engineers in the course of their duties. These interactions play an important role for scientists, engineers, practitioners and students by efficiently:



ACM US Public
Policy Council



- Disseminating scientific and technological research
- Inspiring new directions in thinking
- Strengthening the scientific community
- Providing opportunities to monitor research funded by the government

Participation in scientific conferences is a critical opportunity for scientists and engineers to keep current in rapidly changing fields of science and technology. These conferences facilitate communication among scientists, engineers, practitioners and students. They provide an important venue for presenting cutting-edge research. Government researchers – as well as researchers funded by the government, and the program managers who determine funding – need to be able to participate in these events. By keeping current with the work of their colleagues and leading developments in their field(s), these employees are performing tasks that are central (and often essential) to the effective performance of their jobs. Attending these events allows for opportunities to interact with collaborators, identify potential future employees, and obtain advanced training.

Equally important, government program managers who provide research funding must be able to participate in these conferences. Only by attending and participating can they ensure that government funds are being spent wisely by interacting with their communities, hearing the feedback of expert scientists at research presentations, learning about emerging research areas that may need future funding, seeing what research areas are being adequately funded by private industry (and can thus survive reduced government funding), and interacting with students and faculty to ensure that the best and brightest people consider careers in public service as government researchers.

Scientific and technical conferences already have review processes and regulations in place. These limitations are designed to help control spending on both the event and travel to the event, particularly when government funding is involved.

We believe that existing oversight and review measures for scientific and technical conferences meet the spirit, if not the letter, of the proposed restrictions; neither those events nor the personnel attending them should have additional, damaging restrictions and limitations placed upon them. We therefore request that you consider exempting recognized scientific, technical and educational meetings from the proposed travel expense limits in these pieces of legislation. We also request an exemption of the employee caps for meetings of national and international standards bodies, as U.S. participation in those meetings is critical to national economic interests.



If we can provide additional information or assist in any other way with this process, please contact the USACM Public Policy Office at 212-626-0541.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eugene H. Spafford'.

Eugene H. Spafford, Ph.D.
Chair
U.S. Public Policy Council
Association for Computing Machinery

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric Grimson'.

Eric Grimson, Ph.D.
Chair
Computing Research Association
Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Reinhard Laubenbacher'.

Reinhard Laubenbacher, Ph.D.
Vice President for Science Policy
Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James M. Howard'.

James M. Howard
President
IEEE-USA