

STEM Coalition Argues for Federal Support of STEM Education Programs

August 25, 2005

“STEM” is a Washington abbreviation for “Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.” Today there are several proposals before Congress to increase federal support for college-level STEM education programs. These proposals will be considered by the Senate’s Health, Education Labor and Pensions Committee as it debates the anticipated re-authorization of the Higher Education Act, a law that sets directions for much of the nation’s federal involvement in higher education.

What follows is the text of a letter that will be sent to the Senate committee by the STEM Education Coalition, a nonpartisan group that supports federal STEM-related programs for teachers and students at all levels. MAA is particularly interested in, and supportive of, STEM Coalition activities at the collegiate level.

Dear Senator:

As your committee begins work on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education Coalition would urge you to use this opportunity to strengthen our economic competitiveness by encouraging our nation’s brightest students to study and work in the STEM fields.

Our nonpartisan coalition is composed of a diverse range of stakeholders that represent all sectors of the technological workforce - from knowledge workers, to educators, scientists, engineers, technicians, and representatives from the business community. The STEM Education Coalition was established prior to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and has continually supported programs at the Department of Education, the National Science Foundation, and other agencies that offer STEM related programs for teachers and students at all levels.

Excellent mathematics and science programs in our K-12 classrooms and in our higher education institutions are both vital to our nation’s long-term economic prosperity, global competitiveness, and homeland security. To this end, we are pleased with provisions in Title IV of H.R. 609, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005 that provide incentives for students to pursue advanced degrees and careers in the STEM fields. As you consider legislation to reauthorize Title IV, we urge you to give careful consideration to these provisions. In particular, we support the Mathematics and Science Honors Scholarships for students pursuing a baccalaureate, masters, or doctoral degree (or a combination thereof) in physical, life, or

computer sciences, mathematics, and engineering. These are designed to encourage the "best and the brightest" students in the United States to pursue advanced study in the STEM fields and become the next generation of innovators. We are hopeful that language can be developed that assures access to these funds for those academically talented students most in need of financial support and in every region of the country.

Similarly, we support efforts to forgive interest on student loans of those who enter and remain in STEM fields, including teachers in Title I eligible schools, for at least five years. Senator John Warner has introduced a similar measure, S. 765, the Math and Science Incentive Act. We are also very supportive of the language in H.R. 609 that would create Mathematics and Science Education Coordinating Council grants. Bringing together education, business and community leaders at the state level allows all stakeholders to work together to improve math and science education. We suggest these Coordinating Councils be allowed to create teacher professional development and other similar programs along the line of the Making America Competitive Centers as proposed by Senator Coleman in S. 1020, the COMPETE Act of 2005.

Finally, the STEM Coalition urges you to give careful consideration to the higher education STEM reform initiatives outlined in the recent report from the Business Roundtable and other leading business groups (Tapping America's Potential: The Education for Innovation Initiative), which calls on our nation to double the amount of STEM graduates by 2015. An electronic version of this report is available at <http://www.businessroundtable.org>. We look forward to working with you and other members of the Committee to continue to strengthen math and science education as HEA reauthorization continues this fall. Please contact James Brown at (202) 872-6229 or Laura Kolton at (202) 872-4384 if we can provide you with any additional information or if you have any questions.