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America COMPETES Becomes Law [1]

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In a surprise move, the 114th Congress passed S. 3084, the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act [3] (AICA) before adjourning in 2016. The Senate approved the AICA by unanimous consent and the House followed suit passing the bill in pro forma session. The legislation became Public Law No. 114-329 in January 2017.

Completing legislative work on this key authorization is largely due to the efforts of Senator Cory Gardner. The AICA is the latest iteration of the America COMPETES Act, which establishes the policies governing the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and federal programs on innovation, manufacturing, and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education. Senator Gardner co-led the bipartisan reauthorization effort in the Senate over an 18 month period. The Senator worked closely with CU as he drafted the bill - including hosting roundtable discussions in Colorado and DC - as well as during negotiations with the House Science Committee, and incorporated many university recommendations in the final legislation.

As a result of Senator Gardner's leadership, Senate and House negotiators were able to find common ground on a variety of challenging science policy provisions. Since 2013, the House had adopted a succession of bills containing language that scientific leaders argued would have restricted NSF's ability to support the best research. The compromise AICA bill resolves these issues and reaffirms the importance of NSF's merit-based review process. In addition, the bill recognizes NSF's work to communicate to the public how research grants are in the national interest; creates an interagency working group to reduce administrative burden on academic researchers; incentivizes broadening participation in STEM fields; and boosts commercialization of research discoveries. While the bill does not authorize funding levels, it also does not pick winners and losers among the sciences supported by the NSF by singling out specific directorates for cuts.

CU Boulder's leadership team sent a letter of thanks and congratulations to Senator Gardner after the bill passed. Chancellor Phil DiStefano also personally thanked the Senator.

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