

US House Republicans vote to restrict research funding

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US House Republicans voted Wednesday to place limits on funding for scientific research, including climate change studies, as they passed legislation that more narrowly defines their priorities.

Many in the American scientific community criticized the bill, which passed 217 votes to 205 and sets funding guidelines for the National Science Foundation for fiscal year 2016 beginning October 1.

The America Competes Reauthorization Act still has to be reconciled with a Senate version, and the White House has threatened a veto if the measure passes as is.

The bill slightly raises overall scientific funding levels, from \$7.3 billion this year to \$7.6 billion in 2016.

But scientists expressed concern that Republicans were locking in specific funding amounts to each of the seven directorates of the research foundation.

In previous years the NSF itself determined the allocation of federal grants and funding.

Democrats fumed that the bill automatically slashes social, behavioral and economic sciences by 55 percent compared to 2015, while geosciences including [climate research](#) shrinks eight percent to \$1.2 billion.

Research budgets for green energy programs would be hit too.

Conversely, Republican prioritize [funding](#) for biology, computer science, engineering, mathematics and physical sciences.

"Unfortunately, NSF has funded a number of projects that do not meet the highest standards of scientific merits," Republican Lamar Smith, who chairs the House Science, Space and Technology Committee.

Many Republicans in Congress openly reject or doubt scientific evidence that [climate change](#) is driven by human activity.

The bill prioritizes "basic research and development" and requires that federally-funded scientific projects are "in the national interest."

A coalition of more than 140 researchers, universities, laboratories and other organizations protested against the law, joined by Democrats denouncing what they called the politicization of research.

"Setting authorization levels according to directorate will reduce the flexibility NSF requires to take advantage of unanticipated discoveries and insights, which are coming ever more rapidly in the modern age," the Coalition for National Science Funding said in a letter to lawmakers.

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