

April 30, 2026

Honorable Michael Kratsios
Assistant to the President and Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20504

Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Bill Cassidy
Chairman, Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education,
Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Director Kratsios, Majority Leader Thune, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Cassidy,
and Ranking Member Sanders:

We write as former Chairs of the National Science Board and former Directors of the National Science Foundation — individuals who have served, across administrations of both parties, as stewards of America's scientific enterprise. We write with a single purpose: to underscore the urgency of restoring full leadership and governance at the National Science Foundation (NSF) during a period of intense international competition.

The United States is engaged in a consequential race for global leadership, which in turn depends on scientific and technological leadership. As President Trump warned in his letter to Director Kratsios, "Rivals abroad seek to usurp America's position as the world's greatest maker of marvels and producer of knowledge." China's five-year plan targets the precise areas where American strength is most critical — artificial intelligence, semiconductors, biotechnology, quantum technology, and advanced manufacturing — backed by sustained investment and a rapidly expanding scientific workforce. For the first time in our history, China is investing more in R&D than the U.S.

The country that leads in S&T will set the terms of competition — economic and military. The U.S. must be that country. NSF is indispensable to meeting this challenge, as the government agency that explores the unknown and the unexpected — the discoveries that will lead to new critical technologies.

Defense and national security leaders understand the dangers of technological surprise. *Scientific surprise* comes earlier—the breakthrough made abroad in a field where America underinvested, enabling the next generation of AI, medicine, materials, or weapons systems before we saw it coming. Averting scientific and technological surprise requires sustained investment across the full spectrum of research areas; this is the only lasting protection against the unknown. **NSF's portfolio, spanning every field of inquiry and selected on merit alone, is the nation's primary hedge against the risk of scientific surprise.**

NSF needs both its Director and its Board to meet its mission. Scientific preeminence requires an enduring compact between government and the research enterprise — one that meets the nation's immediate priorities, connects to the long horizon of discovery, and trains the science and engineering workforce we need. The Foundation, created as a Board and a Director, embodies this compact. The NSF Director ensures the agency executes effectively and serves the country. The National Science Board, composed of distinguished scientists, engineers, and public servants drawn from every field and every corner of the nation, provides the vision, strategic oversight, national perspective, and connection to the research frontier. Together, they make NSF greater than the sum of its parts.

We therefore respectfully urge two actions:

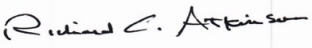
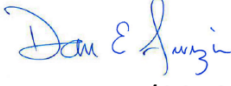
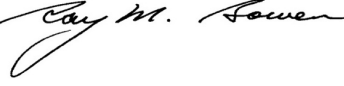
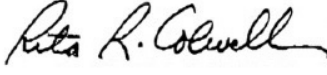

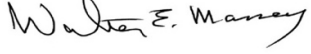


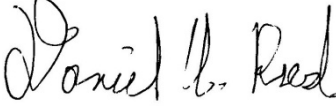

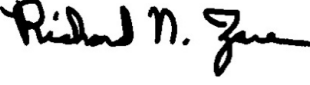
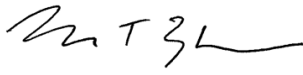
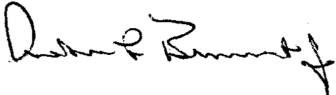
First, we ask that the Senate promptly address the vacancy in the position of NSF Director. NSF needs permanent, confirmed leadership as quickly as possible. We encourage the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and Senate leadership to act expeditiously.

Second, we urge that the White House quickly seat a highly qualified new National Science Board. A Board constituted with the depth and breadth of scientific and national expertise that the mission demands will strengthen NSF, give the new Director the expert and independent counsel needed to succeed, and send a clear signal — to our scientific community and to our competitors — that America is fully committed to leading the world in science and technology.

As President Trump wrote, “We have the opportunity to cement America’s global technological leadership and usher in the Golden Age of American Innovation.” We urge you to seize this opportunity by ensuring NSF has the long-term leadership and resources needed to deliver for our country.

We stand ready to assist the administration, the Senate, and the country in any way we can.

Respectfully,

	
Richard Atkinson, NSF Director 1976-1980	Dan Arvizu, NSB Chair 2012-2016
	
Ray Bowen, NSB Chair 2010-2012	Rita Colwell, NSF Director 1998-2004
	
Neal Lane, NSF Director 1993-1998	Walter Massey, NSF Director 1991-1993
	
Ellen Ochoa, NSB Chair 2020-2022	Subra Suresh, NSF Director 2010-2013
	
Dan Reed, NSB Chair 2022-2024	Diane Souvaine, NSB Chair 2018-2020
	
Richard Zare, NSB Chair 1996-1998	Maria Zuber, NSB Chair 2016-2018
	
Arden Bement, Jr., NSF Director 2004-2010	