

February 18, 2011

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Honorable Eric Cantor
Majority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Leader:

Two of the amendments under consideration for inclusion in H.R. 1, the *Full Year Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011*, contain language that would negatively impact America's science centers and science museums. The first, Amendment No. 35, would eliminate funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Nation's primary source of federal support for museums. The second, Amendment No. 471, would prohibit funding from the bill to be used for activities at non-federal museums.

As the chief executive officer of the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) – representing 342 science centers and museums across the United States – I respectfully ask you and your House colleagues to oppose these amendments.

America's science centers and museums, which include Amazeum Square in Lynchburg; Nauticus and the Battleship Wisconsin in Norfolk; the Science Museum of Virginia in Richmond; the Science Museum of Western Virginia in Roanoke; the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester; the Virginia Air and Space Center in Hampton; the Virginia Discovery Museum in Charlottesville; the Virginia Living Museum in Newport News; and the Virginia Museum of Natural History in Martinsville – are valuable community resources that provide critical, hand-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) experiences for people of all ages.

To help fulfill these compelling educational needs within their communities, ASTC's members compete for federal support through competitive, merit-based programs that are authorized by Congress and administered by a number of federal agencies in accordance with their respective missions. These agencies include the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The informal education that takes place in science centers and museums – like those listed above – contributes significantly to improving the STEM acumen of our youth – America's future leaders. A recent National Academy of Sciences study, *Learning*



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Science in Informal Environments, documented the effectiveness of museums to deliver high quality, highly effective, hands-on educational experiences to millions of children, parents and teachers who visit these institutions annually. Dr. Phillip Bell, the study's lead author noted that "Learning is broader than schooling, and informal...environments and experiences play a crucial role. These experiences can kick-start and sustain long-term interests that involve sophisticated learning."

As citizens and educators, ASTC members understand the budget challenges you face, along with your need to restrain spending. We do, however, believe it is wrong to completely deny our institutions the right to compete for merit-based support from authorized – and effective – federal programs. On behalf of America's science centers and museums, I therefore urge you and your colleagues to oppose these amendments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anthony Rock", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anthony (Bud) Rock
Chief Executive Officer