



American
Physical
Society

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September 8, 2020

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
House Committee on Science, Space and Technology
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Johnson:

On behalf of the American Physical Society (APS) – the nation’s largest physics organization with more than 54,000 members in academia, the private sector and national labs – I want to thank you for your efforts thus far to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruption to the U.S. Research and Development (R&D) enterprise.

APS supports your recently introduced, bipartisan *Supporting Early-Career Researchers Act* and its aim to help ensure continuity during the early stages of the careers of our top researchers. This fellowship program will enable recent PhD graduates and postdocs to conduct independent research for two years, allowing them to further develop and/or augment their research skills. These opportunities will not only benefit the awardees but also their future employers – either in academia, industry or the national lab system – and will ultimately strengthen the U.S. research enterprise and contribute to our nation’s recovery from the pandemic.

As you know, the current pandemic has resulted in a severe reduction in our nation’s research activity, with many of our universities and national labs experiencing a temporary, but nearly complete, shutdown of research. While university hiring of new postdoctoral researchers and junior faculty has slowed or halted, we continue to see low unemployment rates in the U.S. tech sector as companies continue to compete globally for scientific talent.

The severe financial stress in our universities means that new opportunities in academia are not likely to return to pre-pandemic levels for some time. It is essential that we maintain our capacity to prepare new members of our R&D workforce for a broad set of career options, including research positions outside of academia. By providing recent PhD graduates and postdocs opportunities to further develop their independent research skills, they will become more competitive candidates regardless of career choice and even stronger contributors to our nation’s research enterprise.

As the bill moves forward, we offer the following suggestions for clarity and to broaden the impact of this legislation:

- Clearly define the groups eligible for this new award and distinguish it from the current NSF Faculty Early Career Development Program (CAREER), which supports researchers who already hold career positions in academia. We understand the Act intends to provide career continuity and support for recent PhD graduates and postdocs, and this intent should be explicitly stated in the bill text.
- Allow the awardees to partner, as appropriate, with research labs located outside of an institution of higher education. These partnerships would broaden the program's reach and allow for all sectors of the US R&D enterprise to participate.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to discuss these issues further, please do not hesitate to contact APS Associate Director of Government Affairs Mark Elsesser (elsesser@aps.org; 202.662.8710).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Philip H. Bucksbaum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Philip H. Bucksbaum
President, American Physical Society