



May 11, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy:

As congressional conferees begin their work to reconcile the differences between the Senate-passed United States Innovation and Competition Act (USICA) and the House-passed America Creating Opportunities, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength Act (COMPETES), I am writing to offer, on behalf of America Forward, our support of key provisions contained in the two measures.

The America Forward Coalition is made up of more than 100 innovative, high-impact organizations from across the country that are working to solve some of our nation's most pressing challenges in education, workforce development, and poverty alleviation. America Forward unites social innovators with policymakers to advance a public policy agenda that advances equity, fosters innovation, rewards results, catalyzes cross-sector partnerships, and transforms local impact into national change.

We believe that both measures contain a number of provisions that will advance our Coalition's shared priorities, including:

- PreK–8 Informal STEM Program: Grants to institutions of higher education or non-profit organizations (or consortia of such intuitions or organizations) for research on programming that engages students in grades PreK–8, including underrepresented and rural students, in STEM in order to prepare such students to pursue degrees or careers in STEM.
- Rural STEM Education: A pilot program of regional cohorts in rural areas that will provide peer support, mentoring, and hands-on research experiences for rural STEM educators of students in prekindergarten through grade 12, in order to build an ecosystem of cooperation among educators, researchers, academia, and local industry.
- Hands-On Learning Opportunities: Grants for non-profits for programs that support hands-on learning opportunities in STEM education, including via after-school activities and innovative learning opportunities such as robotics.

- Apprenticeships: Reauthorization of the National Apprenticeship Act and the creation of new apprenticeship opportunities which expand Registered Apprenticeships that provide workers with paid, on-the-job-training.
- Postsecondary STEM Pathways Grants: Grants to support equitable access to postsecondary STEM pathways to increase the number of students in high school exposed to high-quality STEM advanced coursework, support students in reducing college costs, improve postsecondary credit transfers, and increase postsecondary completion.
- Improving Access to Elementary and Secondary Computer Science Education: Grants to State educational agencies to increase access to computer science education and the development of computational thinking skills for students enrolled in elementary schools and secondary schools, particularly for students from groups who are underrepresented in computer science fields.
- Pell Grants for Job Training: Adding eligibility for Pell Grants to students enrolled in rigorous and high-quality short-term skills and job training programs that lead to industry-based credentials and ultimately employment in high-wage, high-skill industry sectors or careers.

America Forward believes that in order for our nation to remain competitive, we must prioritize programs that work and policies that are equitable. The provisions listed above will move America forward in making strides toward having a robust education system that is up to date with the current needs of today's students and the workforce they will enter into.

Thank you in advance for considering our views as the conferees develop a final bill. We look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress to advance these important provisions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deborah Smolover". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Deborah" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Smolover".

Deborah Smolover  
Executive Director, America Forward  
Managing Partner, New Profit