

July 14, 2014

The Honorable Carl Levin
269 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

The undersigned organizations urge opposition to a provision included in the Coburn-Heitkamp substitute to S.1347, Conference Accountability Act of 2013, which would limit international travel to a single conference to 50 employees for any individual government agency.

We appreciate fully the importance of restraining federal spending, however it is critical that a workable waiver process exists in order to ensure the most cost-efficient and appropriate decision is being made in regards to international conferences. This 50 person limitation has particular impact on the ability of NASA scientists to collaborate with their international counterparts.

We respectfully urge Congress to redraft the provision to allow for a waiver process that is thorough and transparent, but also one that can produce approvals when truly justified. We specifically request the language be rewritten as:

No agency may pay the travel expenses for more than 50 employees of that agency who are stationed in the United States, for any single conference occurring outside the United States, unless the agency head provides a waiver from this policy if he or she determines that exceptional circumstances exist whereby more than 50 employees attending any single conference occurring outside the United States is the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose. The grounds for any such waiver must be documented in writing by the agency head and posted online as a part of the agency's quarterly report.

We appreciate your consideration and attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Air Force Association

IEEE-USA

American Association for the Advancement
of Science

National Academy of Forensic Engineers

American Astronomical Society

National Society of Professional Engineers

American Geophysical Union

New Mexico Optics Industry Association

ASME

The Optical Society

Association of Universities for Research
in Astronomy

SAE International

Council of Scientific Society Presidents

SPIE, International Society for Optics
and Photonics