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 exist 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          
American Association for the Advancement of Science          
American Astronomical Society          
American Geophysical Union          
ASME          
Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy          
Council of Scientific Society Presidents

IEEE-USA          
National Academy of Forensic Engineers          
National Society of Professional Engineers          
New Mexico Optics Industry Association          
The Optical Society          
SAE International          
SPIE, International Society for Optics and Photonics