The Honorable Harry Reid  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid,

I am writing on behalf of IEEE-USA to urge you to oppose Senate Amendment #67 to the Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013 (H.R. 933), which would discourage the participation of federal scientists and engineers in scientific and technical conferences and related meetings by arbitrarily restricting the number of government employees who can attend any meeting or conference to 25.

It is important that Congress understand that S&T conferences play an important role in supporting federal R&D missions, helping agencies advance their research and organizational agendas in real and tangible ways. Professional conferences benefit federal researchers and their organizations by exposing them to findings from other Institutions. It gives them the opportunity to interact with the top researchers in their fields and to be as current as possible on promising research directions. These interactions foster productive collaborations and accelerate and improve the work of federal researchers and funders. Many federal program managers use technical conferences as opportunities to engage with a wide collection of researchers for peer review, program reviews, research priorities, and future program plans. This approach facilitates necessary federal outreach to the external community in an efficient way with measurable savings in cost and time. Conferences also provide a venue where federal hiring managers can encourage, assess and even recruit undergraduate and graduate students as part of their workforce development and hiring plans. At a higher level, conferences contribute to the rapid diffusion of knowledge, which encourages innovation critical to the nation’s economic growth and national security.

Artificial restrictions on federal participation in S&T conferences, no matter how well intentioned, are having multiple negative impacts…from impeding the rapid dissemination of R&D to requiring new bureaucratic approval processes that drain increasingly limited federal resources from core R&D activities.

For more information highlighting the value of federal participation in scientific and technical conferences and the unintended consequences of the efforts to date restricting such participation, I would encourage you to read IEEE-USA’s position statement, “Participation in Professional Conferences By Government Scientists and Engineers,”, which is available on-line at: http://www.ieeeusa.org/policy/positions/profconferences1012.pdf

Sincerely,  

Marc T. Apter  
IEEE-USA President