May 11, 2009

The Honorable Bart Gordon
Chairman
House Committee on Science
and Technology
2321 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ralph Hall
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science
and Technology
394 Ford HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Gordon and Ranking Member Hall:

Discoveries funded by federal research agencies have driven innovation in the field of computer science, which, in turn, underpins our information technology sector and economic growth. The Networking and Information Technology Research and Development Act of 2009 recognizes this important linkage by better coordinating and scaling up successful federal programs. The bill will strengthen the National Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD) program.

Numerous federal advisory and outside studies have detailed how breakthroughs in computing drive economic growth and have called for more funding, better coordination, and a new focus for federally funded computing research. This legislation includes a number of key provisions recommended by the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) – including a requirement for strategic planning by NITRD and a new focus on cyber-physical systems.

We are also pleased that the legislation does include provisions intended to improve computer science education. The current education pipeline will not satisfy the future workforce demands of an industry that includes some of the country’s most innovative and successful companies. It is crucial that K-12 students are exposed to computer science education. Both PCAST and the National Academies have called attention to this issue.

This legislation requires, as part of NITRD’s strategic planning, that the program develop plans to strengthen the education pipeline and the diversity of students within it. We still believe the legislation could go further by expanding K-12 math and science programs at the National Science Foundation and having the Department of Education reengage with the NITRD program. We hope that we can continue to work with the committee to address these goals.
As a key stakeholder in the computing field, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on this legislation throughout the committee’s process. Thank you for considering our views and should you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Robert B. Schnabel
Chair, ACM Education Policy Committee
Dean, School of Informatics, Indiana University

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