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Luncheon Remarks

**NSF EPSCoR 21st Annual Conference
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“From the Top”

Good afternoon. On this, the 21st annual conference for the EPSCoR partnership, it is a pleasure to once again welcome you to NSF's home here in Arlington. Yesterday, Lance Haworth developed the theme, "If a Tree Falls..." My remarks are entitled "From the Top." This is a play on words. It was suggested by EPSCoR's premier player with words, Henry Blount. Some people seek to channel their wildest energies; Henry seems to channel Oscar Wilde. First, a disclaimer: From the Top does not mean "From the Top, Down". Second, the allusion is from the performing arts. Taking it "From the Top" means to play a musical piece from the beginning of a passage. Third, "From the Top" is also the name of a show, launched first on National Public Radio and now also on public television.

The show "takes viewers behind the scenes with today's rising young musicians, and captures the excitement of their radio debuts...[and] reveals that they bring passion and determination not only to music, but to everything [they do]." In music, a composer often features a main theme in a movement. Here is my main theme: EPSCoR's work is both *fundamental* to the mandate of the NSF and *vital* to the advancement of research and education in science and engineering across our nation. The heart and the core of EPSCoR are found in the National Science Foundation Act of 1950.

The original act reads, "it shall be one of the objectives of the Foundation to strengthen basic research and education in the sciences... throughout the United States, including its Territories and possessions, and to avoid undue concentration of such research and education."

For nearly 60 years NSF has carried the mandate of advancing research and education in science and engineering to all regions of the country. For the past 30 years, EPSCoR has been a leading program by which NSF advances that mandate.

The National Science Board established EPSCoR in 1978. NSF made the first EPSCoR awards in Fiscal Year 1980. With the arrival on October 1 of Fiscal Year 2010, we are celebrating the beginning of the fourth decade of funding for EPSCoR.

EPSCoR now includes 27 states plus Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands for a total of 29 jurisdictions. EPSCoR jurisdictions are home to about 20% of the nation's population, to 25% of the nation's research institutions and to 16% of the nation's employed scientists and engineers. Neither longevity nor breadth of scope necessarily means sustainability, but they do augur a fine future.

Today, in light of the leading role for science envisioned in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, EPSCoR's work is more important now than ever before.

For example, in speaking to the National Academy of Sciences in April, President Obama said, “Science is more essential for our prosperity, our security, our health, our environment, and our quality of life than it has ever been.”

Moreover, the President has set a goal of increasing R&D investment in the US to exceed 3% of gross domestic product. Our discussions here seek to ensure that EPSCoR jurisdictions will play a vibrant role in achieving that goal.

EPSCoR seeks to continue to create ways to keep score. We have the challenge to find the metrics of not only the things we value that are easy to measure, but also to find ways to keep score in things we value that are hard to measure. In human capital, it’s the ingenuity and complementarity of our collaborations, and in what James Dietz describes as social capital—namely, the stock of good will accruing from cooperative relations among two or more parties. We seek to be ingenious and diligent in collecting, telling and re-telling EPSCoR’s stories. These are stories of inventiveness in partnerships as well as invention and innovation in the lab. These are stories of collaborations within EPSCoR jurisdictions that synergize their research and educational resources. These collaborations create new opportunities for young students, grad students, researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs.

Over the past 30 years, EPSCoR has evolved into a Program of Experimentation. It is a federal-state partnership that continues to show how to create and sustain robust infrastructures that support world-class research and education in science and engineering.

Our challenge—the grand challenge of EPSCoR—is to sustain this leading peak performance while broadening the base of excellence to even more fields of discovery.

President Obama captured the driving spirit of EPSCoR during his remarks at the National Medals of Science Awards on October 7.

He said, “We see the promise -- not just for our economy but for our health and well-being -- in the human capacity for creativity and ingenuity. And we are reminded of the power of free and open inquiry, which is not only at the heart of all of your work, but at the heart of this experiment we call America.”

Like our democracy, EPSCoR embraces the power and promise of individuals working together to create and sustain opportunity for all.