



### Stubblefield: Federal bill on patent reform would streamline innovation for universities

By: Sabrina Stubblefield Guest Columnist November 30, 2017 0



Sabrina Stubblefield

The University of Oklahoma works toward making a positive difference in the world through innovation from academic research.

Through the Office of Technology Development, OU researchers are able to transform ideas into a tangible impact for the betterment of society. Patents are a critical part of creating this economic impact. A major area that affects society is in the health care landscape.

Researchers every day are working to advance the health care landscape, which in turn improves and saves the lives of not only Oklahomans, but people across the globe. Patents are a critical component of the health care industry, and the Stronger Patents Act of 2017 would help protect the intellectual property that is produced in our state's university system, which is where many of these innovations are born.

There was a recent panel discussion at the University of Central Oklahoma on this very topic. Representatives from the largest research-oriented universities in the state spoke about their investment in intellectual property, and the benefits of a strong patent system. A strong patent system helps universities in moving research out into industry. There would not be much incentive for industry to work with a university to help further a technology without strong patent protection.

Higher learning institutions such as the OU, UCO and Oklahoma State University invest time and money into innovating new and important technologies that benefit so many, from a new variety of wheat or a lifesaving drug or medical procedure. Our investment in research propels society forward, but we can continue only if we are granted stronger patents in a timely manner that protects our intellectual property.

The Stronger Patents Act, a bipartisan bill brought forth by U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., and U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., aims to streamline the patent process so that innovators, like OU, can continue to do just that: innovate. At present, the United States is ranked 10th globally for issued patents, whereas it used to be ranked No. 1. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, or USPTO, is bogged down, and patents can sometimes take years to be issued, putting our research and innovation at risk.

The bill itself would help to issue patents more quickly by allowing more money that is intended to reach the patent office to actually get there. It would also reverse several Supreme Court decisions that have undermined the confidence of innovators and investors in the USPTO's ability to fairly protect and quickly issue patents.

The Stronger Patents Act of 2017 is legislation that could positively affect not only universities' ability to conduct research, but innovation for other industries and our state's ability to drive the economy forward. I encourage all of Oklahoma's legislators to support this bill.

Sabrina Stubblefield is a patent attorney for the University of Oklahoma's Office of Technology and Development. She lives in Oklahoma City.

**Ed. Note:** A pronoun was changed in this column at the author's request on Nov. 30, 2017

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