

OPENING STATEMENT

THE HONORABLE RALPH HALL (R-TX)
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology

The National Nanotechnology Initiative Amendments Act of 2008

Wednesday, April 15, 2008

10:00 am

2318 Rayburn Office Building

Thank you Chairman Gordon. I was pleased to be an original cosponsor of the *21st Century Nanotechnology Research and Development Act*, which established our national nanotechnology program in 2003. It was the right thing to do, and thus far, has proven to be successful. I hope that we can continue to work together to ensure that the reauthorization of this vital program before us can move forward in a bipartisan fashion and with bipartisan support.

This Committee has spent some time focusing on various aspects of nanotechnology at the subcommittee level, much of which has been incorporated into the draft legislation before us today. I do not need to spend a lot of time talking about the potential benefits and challenges of nanotechnology to our society. Mr. Chairman, you and I, as Co-chairs of the Nanotechnology Caucus and as Members of this Committee for many years, are well aware of them, and I am certain our witnesses may have a point or two to make about them as well. Suffice it to say, despite its name, this is no small issue. Our scientists are using nanotechnology to help create clean, secure affordable energy; low-cost filters to provide clean drinking water; medical devices and drugs; sensors to detect and identify harmful chemical and biological agents; and techniques to clean up hazardous chemicals in the environment. And this is just the beginning of the list.

I recognize that as these nanotechnologies are being developed, we have a responsibility to mitigate potential environmental, health and safety (EHS) risks, as we do with any new technology. This work is currently being done and as long as the need is there, agencies should continue to fund EHS research, but it should not necessarily take precedence over or be funded at the expense of the other component areas identified in the strategic plan. My main interest, as we move forward with this bill, is to make sure that we are careful to allow a multi-agency program, which seems to be working well, to continue to have the flexibility needed to do its work without being too prescriptive. We can tweak it a bit, but we certainly do not need to fix something that is not broken and, in fact, serves as a good model for how an interagency program should work.

We have before us a well-rounded and esteemed panel of experts with different interests in nanotechnology, and I look forward to hearing their views on this bill and on ways that we can work to make improvements to it.