

Opening Statement
The Honorable Vernon J. Ehlers (R-MI)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research and Science Education
Investing in High-Risk, High-Reward Research

October 8, 2009

Today our Subcommittee will hear from a panel of experts testifying on how the federal government should fund both risky and potentially rewarding research. Tight agency research budgets and intense competition have established an environment of cautious, incremental research proposals from many scientists seeking federal support. Ironically, many of the greatest challenges faced by our nation in health care, energy and national security may not be addressed in a timely manner because there are limited opportunities for promising ideas to be heard and funded simply because they are “outside of the box”.

Though the National Science Board, the National Academies, the American Academy and others have identified the need to address transformative research in our federal basic research portfolio, it is necessary to examine how to best facilitate the introduction and proliferation of this type of research. Transformative discoveries have emerged from federally funded research in spite of a lack of dedicated programs for this purpose. Learning how we might adapt our federal funding system to elicit more groundbreaking discoveries is a worthy goal, and I look forward to hearing the insights on this topic from our witnesses today.