

**OPENING STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS  
RANKING MEMBER  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND SCIENCE EDUCATION  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

***Women in Academic Science and Engineering***

October 17, 2007

2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Understanding the difficulties that female faculty face is challenging. The climate is changing, but it is still an uphill battle to get faculty of either gender to have frank conversations about this historically volatile topic. Nevertheless, as the National Academy's 2006 "Beyond Bias and Barriers" report pointed out, higher education must change both the culture and structure of its institutions so that obstacles to women advancing in science and engineering are removed.

While I have spent a lot of my time in Congress working to improve STEM education at the K-12 levels, today's topic is not as distanced from elementary and secondary education as you might think. Without role models along every step of the way, we face an impossible task to encourage young girls to pursue careers in science and engineering. The best role models tend to be happy ones, not women who are regretting their decision to stick it out in science and engineering fields because they are subject to pervasive negative attitudes. Students are quick to recognize which professors like their jobs and be influenced accordingly about their own career goals.

I have been fortunate to have female colleagues from the time I was an undergraduate student at Calvin College straight through to my time as a physics professor, but of course, these women were always far outnumbered by their male colleagues. Even though significant progress has occurred since I left academia, many institutions are still in need of dissolving antiquated perceptions – and the actions that come with them - about the appropriateness of women in science and engineering.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about some of the innovative programs that are making a difference in recruiting and retaining female faculty, and how we can build upon them.