



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

Markup of the *Scientific Research in the National Interest Act* (H.R. 3293)

Chairman Smith: H.R. 3293, the “Scientific Research in the National Interest Act,” is a bipartisan bill that ensures the grant process at the National Science Foundation (NSF) is transparent and accountable to the American public, who actually fund the research.

America’s future economic growth and national security depend on innovation. Public and private investments in research and development (R&D) fuel the economy, create jobs and lead to new technologies that benefit Americans’ daily lives.

But to remain a world leader, we must ensure that our investments fund the highest quality basic research in science that serves our nation’s interest.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the federal government has awarded too many grants that few Americans would consider to be in the national interest.

For instance, the NSF awarded \$700,000 of taxpayer money to support a climate change-themed musical that quickly closed. And \$919,000 for a social media project that targeted Americans’ online political speech. A few other examples of questionable grants include:

- \$487,000 to study the Icelandic textile industry during the Viking era;
- \$340,000 to study early human-set fires in New Zealand;
- \$233,000 to study ancient Mayan architecture and salt industry; and
- \$199,000 to consider whether Turkish women wear veils because they are fashionable.

When the NSF funds such projects there is less money to support scientific research that keeps our country on the forefront of innovation.

These include areas such as computer science, advanced materials, lasers, telecommunications, information technology, development of new medicines, nanotechnology and dozens of others that hold the greatest promise of revolutionary scientific breakthroughs. These are the sectors that can create millions of new jobs and even transform society in a positive way.

How do we assure hardworking American families that their tax dollars are spent only on high priority research that is in the national interest?

NSF invests about \$6 billion of public funds each year on research projects and related activities. Over the past two years, the Science Committee has reviewed numerous NSF grants, which include close examination of several dozen project files.

This oversight proved useful to the Committee, to the NSF and to the public. It provided insight into the merit-review process and the development of grant abstracts.

The NSF peer review, merit selection process is and should remain the foundation of the grant-making process. The purpose of the legislation today is to add transparency and accountability to that process. The 1950 enabling legislation, which created the NSF, set forth the Foundation's mission and cited the "national interest" as the foundation for public support and dissemination of basic scientific research.

The Science in the National Interest Act reaffirms and restores this crucial mission. The legislation requires the NSF to explain in writing and in non-technical language how each research grant awarded supports the national interest.

This will add transparency, accountability and credibility to the NSF and its grant process, which will help the NSF earn the public's support.

The bill sets forth that NSF grants should meet at least one of seven criteria that demonstrate that a grant is in the national interest. Examples of requirements for a grant to be made include an increase to America's economic competitiveness, support of our national defense, development of an American STEM workforce, or the promotion of the progress of science for the United States.

To Director Córdova's and the NSF's credit, the NSF began to implement new internal policies in January that acknowledge the need for NSF to communicate clearly and in non-technical terms the research projects it funds and how they are in the national interest. This policy parallels the requirements of this legislation.

As Dr. Cordova testified before our Committee earlier this year, the legislation before us and the NSF's new policies are compatible and consistent with each other. This bill establishes in law high standards that all publicly funded grants should meet.

Congress has a responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and are focused on national priorities. Today, the NSF is able to fund just one out of every five proposals submitted by our scientists and research institutions.

With a national debt that exceeds \$18 trillion and continues to climb by hundreds of billions of dollars each year, we cannot fund every worthy proposal, much less frivolous ones like a climate change musical.

The legislation before us re-affirms in law that every NSF grant must support research that is demonstrably in the national interest. This is an essential step to restore and maintain taxpayer support for basic scientific research. The bill is cosponsored by nineteen Republican and Democratic Members of this Committee.

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