

COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND  
TECHNOLOGY**  
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)  
Markup of H.R. 4186: The FIRST Act**

**Chairman Smith:** Thank you, Dr. Bucshon, for all your work on the Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science, and Technology, or FIRST Act, (H.R. 4186).

The U.S. leads the world in research and development spending. But despite the U.S. government's spending more on R&D than any other country, American pre-eminence in several science and technology fields has started to slip.

Experts have projected that the U.S. will fall behind China in R&D spending in a few years. Unless we act, American researchers will continue to fall behind in areas such as supercomputing and particle physics. And we risk losing our lead in nano-technology, the health sciences, aerospace, lasers and other crucial areas.

To remain globally competitive, we need to make sure our priorities are funded and that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. The FIRST Act keeps America first in areas of science and research that are crucial to economic growth. Our bill focuses taxpayer investments for basic research in critical areas such as biology, chemistry, physics, computer science, engineering and mathematics. Advances in these fields drive innovation, create jobs and keep our economy strong.

In a time of tight budgets, our bill authorizes a small but significant funding increase of 1.5% in Fiscal Year 2015. This additional investment is concentrated in the areas of scientific research that drive future economic growth.

The FIRST Act also encourages federal science agencies to use innovative funding models, such as prize competitions and crowd-sourcing, to solve big problems. Our bill also highlights manufacturing competitiveness as the primary role of the National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST's) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) while providing greater flexibility to MEP centers.

In order to help keep America first in innovation and economic growth, the FIRST Act eliminates red tape, accelerates technology transfer and bolsters STEM education. A well-educated and trained STEM workforce promotes our future economic prosperity. But we must encourage our nation's youth to study science and engineering so they will want to pursue these careers.

The FIRST Act encourages the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support learning experiences that will inspire our future scientists and engineers. It broadens the definition of STEM education to include academic subjects like computer science that build on traditional STEM subjects.

Our legislation also allows the NSF to support student participation in nonprofit competitions, out-of-school activities and field experiences related to STEM. The bill also encourages careful consolidation of overlapping STEM programs and supports outcome-based evaluations of STEM programs.

The FIRST Act assures that scarce taxpayer dollars are spent on high quality science that promotes our national interest. In recent years, the NSF has funded a number of questionable research grants – using up taxpayer money that would have been better spent on higher priorities. For example, how does the federal government justify spending \$50,000 to study lawsuits in Peru from 1600 - 1700? Or almost \$340,000 for early human-set fires in New Zealand?

Taxpayers should be able to rely on Congress and federal agencies to use their hard-earned tax dollars in the most effective way — such as to strengthen our economy, bolster the national defense, and further the national interest. Federal research agencies have an obligation to assure American taxpayers that their money is being spent well.

The FIRST Act does not change NSF's peer review process. But it does expand accountability and requires transparency so that only high quality research receives taxpayer funds. Finally, the FIRST Act reauthorizes and streamlines federal investments at the NSF and NIST by funding research and development to address national needs.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle as the FIRST Act moves forward to the full Science Committee for consideration in the coming weeks.

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