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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Hearing on The Science of Dyslexia

Chairman Smith: Welcome everyone to today's hearing on the Science of Dyslexia. One out of every five people struggle with dyslexia in its various forms. In fact, it is the most common reading disability in America. Yet many Americans remain undiagnosed, untreated, and silently struggle with school or work.

People with dyslexia think in a way that others do not. But typically in our school systems today there is not recognition, early detection, or enough teachers who are trained to spot symptoms of dyslexia early enough to get the students the intervention they need.

That is why we have recently seen grass roots groups, like Decoding Dyslexia, form nationwide and more specialized schools started to fill the void. Unfortunately, not everyone has access to these types of schools and the learning strategies they instill in their students to help them become successful.

I hope today's hearing will serve two purposes. First, contribute to our understanding as policy-makers about the neuroscience of dyslexia. And secondly, build awareness of dyslexia's effect on those of all ages if we fail to diagnose it.

Some may ask why the Science Committee chooses to tackle the issue of dyslexia. My response is simple: many scientists, innovators and other outside-the-box thinkers are dyslexic, such as Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, and Galileo, to name a few.

Many who have dyslexia have used their unique outlook on the world to their advantage. Filmmakers, actors and entertainers such as Steven Spielberg, Henry Winkler, and Jay Leno used their gift to create one-of-a-kind entertainment for us all to enjoy.

In modern times, Dr. Carol Greider of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, who won the Nobel Prize in 2009, has dyslexia. John Chambers, the long-time CEO of Cisco Systems, also has dyslexia. In a recent interview, Chambers spoke about his struggles with dyslexia, saying:

“It would surprise you how many government and business leaders [have] dyslexia. Some people view it as a weakness and maybe it is... Because of my weakness I've learned other ways to accomplish the same goal with faster speed. So in math, I can do equations faster by eliminating the wrong answers quicker than I can get the right answer. It's one of the reasons I talk to young people with dyslexia pretty regularly. You have to have role models.”

We need to unleash the intelligence of people with dyslexia, like Einstein, da Vinci, Carol Greider, and John Chambers. We cannot afford for young, talented students not to reach their potential.

I am glad to see the National Science Foundation fund studies in how astrophysicists with dyslexia view the universe differently due to the visual-spatial skills common in dyslexics. In fact, Matt Mountain, the lead astronomer and director of the Hubble Space Telescope Science Institute, has dyslexia.

Also, the National Institutes of Health is studying the neuroscience of dyslexia, including the work of our witnesses, Dr. Sally Shaywitz and Dr. Guinevere Eden, as well as funding studies on how dyslexic students can best learn.

Beyond the research, we will hear from someone with dyslexia, the parent of a dyslexic student, and an educator for those with learning disabilities like dyslexia.

I have a personal connection with dyslexia since my niece is dyslexic. And a favorite, young 10 year old friend named Leighton, who has dyslexia, has been with me on a Texas ranch. He may be challenged by language arts but he makes up for it with perfect eyesight and exceptional accuracy with his bb gun. And you don't want to compete with him playing Minecraft on his Ipad.

Over 80 members of Congress have joined the bipartisan Congressional Dyslexia Caucus co-chaired by Rep. Bill Cassidy and Science Committee member Julia Brownley. I thank them both for their work in helping educate the public about dyslexia and for advocating policies that support those individuals who have dyslexia.

I also want to acknowledge one of my constituents, Robbi Cooper, who traveled from Austin, Texas, to be here today. She has shared many stories with me about her son Ben who has dyslexia.

More parents as well as other experts on dyslexia will be sharing their stories at a luncheon next door in Rayburn room 2325 immediately following this hearing. All are welcome to attend.

For most people, dyslexia is a disability. But if we change the way we approach it, we can turn disability into possibility-- and give millions of individuals a brighter and more productive future.

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