



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

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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

National Science Foundation Part 1: Overview and Oversight

Chairman Smith: Thank you, Chairwoman Comstock. And welcome Dr. Córdova and Ms. Lerner.

For nearly 70 years, the National Science Foundation (NSF) has served as the basis of taxpayer-funded basic research.

Since its creation in 1950, NSF's mission has been to promote fundamental scientific discovery in the national interest, which helps make the United States a world leader in knowledge and innovation.

Our challenge this year is to set funding priorities that ensure America remains a leader in the global marketplace of ideas and products while also recognizing budgetary limits.

A full reauthorization of the science agencies under our jurisdiction, including NSF, will allow us to rebalance priorities and ensure that our nation's science agencies are on a trajectory to keep America at the forefront of scientific knowledge and discovery.

The Committee finished last year by completing work on the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act, which reauthorized some of NSF's activities. These include STEM education initiatives, entrepreneurship programs and the BRAIN Initiative. In fact, on January 6 it was the last bill signed into law for the 114th Congress.

The new law also reforms federal science agency programs to increase the impact of taxpayer-funded research.

It improves accountability and transparency, reduces administrative burden on researchers, enhances agency oversight, and improves research coordination.

I want to recognize Dr. Córdova for the steps NSF has taken to improve accountability over the last two years.

I have been critical of NSF for past funding of too many projects that seem marginal or frivolous. My concern is that low-risk, low-priority projects detract from investments into groundbreaking research that includes biology, physics, computer science and engineering.

The new law makes permanent and enhances NSF's transparency and accountability policy so that it describes in non-technical terms the research projects it funds.

The law also improves the NSF grant-making process. It affirms that research funded through the merit-review selection process must be in the national interest by meeting one of seven broader impact goals. These goals include increasing economic competitiveness, enhancing the health and welfare of the American public, developing a STEM workforce, and supporting the national defense.

I hope these reforms will prevent future cost overruns and the use of taxpayer funds for liquor, lobbyists and foreign travel, which we have seen in the past.

I look forward to hearing from Dr. Córdova and Ms. Lerner about how the implementation of these reforms is proceeding and about the progress the NSF has made to be more accountable to taxpayers.

I believe there has been noticeable improvement but oversight challenges remain.

The Inspector General's last report to Congress identified several areas in need of improvement or monitoring. These include NSF's management of rotator personnel; the Foundation's move to a new headquarters building in Alexandria, Virginia; NSF's management of the U.S. Antarctic Program; and its efforts to improve grant administration and encourage ethical conduct in research.

I look forward to hearing more about these challenges and how we can work together to address them.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that last week President Trump signed into law two bipartisan Science Committee bills to promote the role of women in science: the INSPIRE Women Act, sponsored by Chairwoman Comstock, and the Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act, sponsored by Ms. Esty.

These laws enable more talented young women to pursue their dreams and change the world with their ideas.

NSF's support for groundbreaking basic research and STEM education can greatly help in making America prosperous.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and yield back.

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