

**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**

Encouraging the Participation of Female Students in STEM Fields

July 21, 2009
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Today's hearing is an opportunity to gain insight into the reasons why young women are being deterred from pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Strengthening math and science education is essential to the future of American economic competitiveness, and the lack of women participation in these areas is a great hindrance that must be remedied.

Despite the fact that women represent more than half of all bachelor's degrees, they constitute only 25 percent of the STEM workforce in the United States. I have spent a considerable amount of time and effort in Congress promoting STEM education, and this Committee has held multiple hearings on the topic, paying particular attention to the need for more women and minorities in STEM fields. While great strides have been made since my days as a student, and later a professor of physics at Calvin College, the data still shows great disparities in the participation of women in STEM. Much to my dismay, women represent only 21 percent of physics degrees according to the National Science Foundation.

It is my hope that today's observations will offer this Committee insight into ways to better support these important fields of study as we continue to explore any federal role. I look forward to the testimony of our distinguished panel, and I thank them for being here.