

Opening Statement of Robert B. Aderholt

National Institutes of Health Hearing

Good morning. Today we welcome Doctor Bertagnolli to our subcommittee for her first hearing as the Director of the National Institutes of Health.

I look forward to learning more about the pioneering scientific research being done at NIH. The investments made at NIH have led to gene immunotherapy revolutionizing cancer treatment, cures and prevention for early-stage diabetes, and diagnostic testing and imaging that can catch the progression of disease when there is still time to change its course. Every life is touched by the discoveries made by investments in the NIH.

It is the high value placed on NIH discoveries, that makes me disappointed to say that the NIH is the only entity within HHS that has not released an assessment, or even made an acknowledgement, regarding some of the failures in response to the COVID pandemic.

For a large portion of the American public, trust in the institution is gone. And once lost, it will take great effort to restore. I encourage you to put as a top priority rebuilding the confidence in the NIH as a leader in unbiased, nonpartisan, objective basic science. It is that history of research that helped support medicines that have saved countless lives.

Annual funding to NIH, more than 48 billion dollars last year, is larger than the annual gross domestic product for half the world. The magnitude of the investment showcases the importance America places on being the world's leader in research and innovation.

I know it is critical to our nation's security that America remain that leader. China's thousand talents program, and outsized investments in biomedical research, are clear dangers to our national interests. Combating foreign interference at our research institutions should be a top

priority, and I want to let you know you have our support. I look forward to learning more about NIH's efforts to protect the security of data and intellectual property.

In the current global environment, concerns over foreign influence on U.S. biomedical research have intensified. This Committee's appropriations bill prohibits certain foreign entities—including the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and any lab owned or controlled by the governments of China, Iran, and Russia—from receiving funds for conducting research, due to the risks they pose to American safety and security. Despite increased efforts by NIH to combat foreign influence in biomedical research, failures related to foreign influence persist.

In 2022, the Department of Health and Human Services inspector general issued a report evaluating how NIH grantees ensure that investigators disclose all foreign financial interests and support and review this information prior to reporting information to NIH.

The OIG found that investigators, in some cases, neglected to disclose substantial foreign contributions, undermining research integrity. The OIG also found that most grantees failed to meet at least one Federal requirement related to their investigators' foreign financial interests and support. In addition, the OIG determined that many grantees lacked oversight practices that would help ensure that all materials submitted to NIH were complete and accurate.

The OIG's recommendations were basic management practices—ensure investigators are trained, have clear disclosure policies, and validate reports. Simple. Necessary. And overdue.

Yet, it has been two years since the report was published, and the recommendation that NIH modify reporting mechanisms requiring grantees to report financial interests and other support involving foreign entities remain unimplemented.

Oversight of the grant funding given out by NIH is paramount. Another top concern is also the range of research institutions receiving funding. Ten percent of the institutions get 75 percent of NIH funding. This is unacceptable.

These same elite institutions saw their campuses overrun by lawlessness, and antisemitism. Much of this funding is NOT supporting basic science and research, but instead supports an ever-growing higher education administrative state.

I support your efforts to increase funding for lower resourced institutions, and expand the base of schools receiving basic research grants. I also want to encourage you to exercise caution when determining your research portfolio. There is no need to wade into controversial research agendas. We are not going to build back the public's trust wading into controversial social issues. I would encourage you to return to your core mission of basic science.

The NIH is not operating under a current authorization, making it one of the largest expired authorizations in government. In addition, it has been decades since Congress made a comprehensive evaluation of the institution's structure.

We have been creating one institute, center, office, or agency piecemeal for over ten years. Adding, but not strategically reorganizing it. This year, in cooperation with the Committee on Energy and Commerce, we solicited broad input from the research community to engage on reform.

Instead of a bold discussion on how to move NIH into the future, we have gotten staunch adherence to the status quo. COVID has shown that the status quo is unacceptable.

I hope that more leaders in the research community will recognize this pivotal opportunity to develop an NIH that serves science and the American public better. We

understand the House proposal is an opening start to discussion and that more work needs to be done by authorizing committees of jurisdiction. But I do believe we should all be able to agree that the NIH we have today does not reflect the best structure to achieve its mission, nor the best structure for science.

We should not shy away from this reality, and I would add that several of these reforms were suggested by the Institute of Medicine more than 20 years ago. I continue to look forward to proposals to help the agency best achieve its mission as we go into the next Congress.

I want to thank you again Director for coming before us today, for a November hearing no less. I now yield to the ranking member, the gentlelady from Connecticut for her opening remarks.

[Ranking Member DeLauro makes remarks]