

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



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

Chairman Smith: The second bill for today's markup is H.R. 4186, the Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science and Technology Act, or FIRST Act, of 2014. I thank Dr. Bucshon for all his work on this important piece of legislation.

The United States leads the world in research and development. Despite 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 about ten years.

American researchers are already falling behind in critical areas. Today the fastest supercomputer in the world is located in China. And we risk losing our lead in other areas such as nano-technology, the health sciences, aerospace, and lasers.

To remain globally competitive, we must ensure that 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. It focuses taxpayer investments for basic research in the critical areas of physical science and engineering.

In a time of tight budgets, this bill authorizes small overall funding increases for the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in Fiscal Year 2015. But this additional investment is concentrated in the areas of scientific research that drive future economic growth.

Physical science and engineering are essential for technological innovations and are the fields that will help create millions of jobs, new businesses, and industries for the future. In contrast, the President's budget request freezes or cuts funds for research in the physical sciences and engineering.

The FIRST Act takes a number of steps to assure that taxpayer funds are only invested in high-priority, high quality research. This starts with the FIRST Act's requirement that the NSF, for the first time, meet minimum standards of public accountability and transparency in its grant funding decisions.

Under the FIRST Act, the NSF will be required to publish a justification of each grant's scientific merits and relevance to the broad national interest. 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.

The FIRST Act reauthorizes the important work done by NIST to set commercial standards in important emerging areas like nanotechnology and cybersecurity.

The TRANSFER Act, an important part of FIRST, encourages our research universities to partner with private entrepreneurs to test and develop technology applications. And it expedites the process of taking new technology to the marketplace.

FIRST also values the education of those who enter into these innovative fields. A well-educated and trained STEM workforce is indispensable to our future economic prosperity. Provisions of the FIRST Act bolster K-12 STEM education and STEM participation.

The FIRST Act broadens the definition of STEM education to include computer science. This small change will have huge consequences. It brings STEM education into the computer age.

We must also inspire our future engineers and scientists. Our legislation allows the NSF to support student participation in nonprofit competitions, out-of-school activities and field experiences related to STEM.

Overall, the FIRST Act ensures that federally funded research is conducted in a transparent and responsible manner. And making more information available to the American public about awarded grants and requiring that they promote the national interest will help NSF to continue to produce first-rate scientific research.

This bill strengthens the economy, improves people's lives, and creates a more open and responsive government. It deserves our support.

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