

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Full Committee Markup of H.R. 5509
April 17, 2018

Thank you Chairman Smith. Today we are marking up two bills- one good and one bad. H.R. 5509, the Innovations in Mentoring, Training, and Apprenticeships Act is a good bill, and I support it.

Research has shown that we are experiencing a significant STEM skills gap in this country. Employers are struggling to find workers with the technical skills they need. One cause for the gap is the lack of coordination between educational institutions and industry.

Skills taught in secondary and post-secondary schools are not aligned with the skills in high demand by employers. With an economy that is increasingly data-driven and reliant on rapidly evolving technologies, we must ensure our workforce can keep pace.

Apprenticeships are a workforce development strategy that enables close coordination between high schools, vocational schools, universities, and local employers. Although other nations have enjoyed the benefits of apprenticeships for decades, apprenticeships remain underutilized in this country. This bill is a positive step in the right direction and is a recognition and endorsement of the good work that the National Science Foundation is doing in this area.

A strong STEM workforce poised to take on the challenges of a 21st century economy is vital for continued growth, security, and global competitiveness.

With regards to H.R. 5509, the Chairman and his staff responded positively to suggestions and concerns of the Minority and to feedback from the National Science Foundation, and modified the bill to improve it. I appreciate these efforts, and I support passage of this bill.

I see we also have amendments offered by the gentlelady from Oregon to make some improvements to the bill, and I look forward to supporting those amendments as well.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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April 17, 2018

Thank you Chairman Smith. Unlike the last bill we considered, this bill, H.R. 5503, is deeply flawed, and the process that got us to this moment was just as flawed, as I will explain.

First, this bill slashes funding for Earth Science by half a billion dollars in FY 19—a quarter of the total Earth Science budget. These cuts are simply another manifestation of the Majority's continued war on climate science.

However, these reckless cuts are so deep that they will likely threaten more than just climate science at NASA. The Earth Science budget supports numerous programs that help Americans, from aiding farmers to saving American lives in natural disaster response.

Where does all this money go? The Majority diverts it to searching for space aliens and to the President's unexamined initiative to build an orbiting moon base, among other things. I wish I were joking.

The Majority slashes funding for programs that help humans here on Earth, and instead prioritizes spending money to find space aliens.

Let me be clear: I think the search for life in the universe is a fascinating quest, and I'm also a strong supporter of Exploration. But I think melting ice caps, rising sea levels, the increases in extreme weather events and drought, and the other serious manifestations of climate change here on Earth are also things we should be concerned about and studying.

I don't have time today to discuss all the issues with this bill, and there are many. I would just note that the bill endorses President Trump's Exploration priorities and plans without the Committee having had a single hearing to review them.

It directs NASA to follow the ISS Transition Plan before Committee Members have even had any opportunity to review it in depth or hear from stakeholders. I could go on with other examples, but I think you get my point.

As problematic as the substance of the bill is, the process that brought us here today is just as problematic. The Majority staff began discussing this legislation with the Minority a couple of weeks ago. They first provided Minority staff with an early draft two weeks ago. A significantly different version was provided to the Minority on April 12th. It came with an ultimatum: in essence, if I didn't agree to support the bill as written, then the Chairman would notice the markup on April 13th with a different, punitive version of the bill.

And that's what happened, just as Members were leaving town for the weekend.

I really don't think vindictiveness is a good basis for legislating. I also don't think it is very effective in the long run. But the reality is we are now marking up a partisan bill that has been rushed to markup with childish ultimatums and arbitrary deadlines—in the process,

disenfranchising Members on both sides of the aisle from being able to conduct the oversight and hearings that one of our Committee's most significant agencies warrants.

This is no way to legislate for an agency that accounts for fully one half of the total dollars our Committee authorizes.

It has needlessly injected partisanship into our Nation's space program, yet again. That doesn't help NASA. Instead, it ultimately winds up weakening the widespread bipartisan support NASA has traditionally enjoyed, and it certainly diminishes the standing of this Committee.

I yield back.