

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas at Full Committee Hearing: Achieving the Promise of a Diverse STEM Workforce

May 9, 2019

Opening Statement

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson for holding this hearing today to discuss how we can achieve the promise of a more diverse STEM workforce in the United States.

This Committee has a long bi-partisan history of supporting STEM education for all and I look forward to continuing that today.

When women and minorities face cultural and institutional barriers to access and advancement in STEM careers, our nation's technological competitiveness suffers. The only way we'll achieve our potential is by utilizing America's most valuable resource: our people. That means developing a diverse STEM-capable workforce from every education level and from every background.

STEM employment in the U.S. continues to grow faster than any other sector and we are struggling to meet that demand.

In order to meet it, the development of talent from all groups is essential. More graduates with STEM degrees means more advanced technologies and a more robust economy.

But it is not just about the economy. STEM graduates have the potential to develop technologies that could save thousands of lives, jump-start a new industry, or even discover new worlds.

Women and underrepresented minorities constitute a substantial proportion of the U.S. population; however our STEM workforce fails to reflect this diversity. While women make up half of the U.S. workforce, they comprise less

than 30 percent of the STEM workforce. Similarly, underrepresented racial and ethnic groups make up only 11 percent of the STEM workforce.

This week I joined Chairwoman Johnson in co-sponsoring the “STEM Opportunities Act of 2019” to help address this disparity.

This bill requires more comprehensive data collection on the students, researchers, and faculty receiving federal science grants. This data will help us identify and reduce the barriers that prevent underrepresented groups from entering and advancing in STEM. It will also help us measure the success of federal STEM programs.

As many of the members of this Committee know, I am a proud graduate of a land-grant institution – The OSU, Oklahoma State University. Not to be confused with Dr. Moore’s institution, the other OSU. The land-grant mission is to serve students of all backgrounds, and influence people’s lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom in service to the community.

In my home district, I have seen this mission brought to life at both OSU and Langston University, which is a historically black college and a land-grant institution. Minority-serving institutions like Langston are successfully making strides in increasing the number of minority students graduating with STEM degrees.

It is important that we also increase STEM opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students, who are often overlooked in this discussion. The “[STEM Opportunities Act of 2019](#)” will bolster the NSF’s Tribal Colleges and Universities Program (TCUP) by providing grants to enhance computer science education at these institutions.

Access to computer science resources and the development of computing skills is critical for underrepresented students in both rural and urban communities.

I’d like to thank our witnesses for being here. This entire panel not only brings a wealth of leadership and expertise in STEM education and workforce development, but they also provide inspiration to students of all backgrounds who are pursuing STEM careers. I look forward to hearing more from each of you about how we can support, encourage and develop the next generation of STEM students.

Lastly, I want to again thank Chairwomen Johnson for her leadership on this important issue. I know it is a subject near and dear to her heart, and I look forward to working with her on the STEM Opportunities Act and additional STEM legislation focused on rural students in the coming year.

Thank you witnesses for being here and I yield back the balance of my time.