COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Ranking Member Lucas Opening Statement at Full Committee Hearing on Building Back the U.S. Research Enterprise

Building Back the U.S. Research Enterprise: COVID Impacts and Recovery

February 25, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, for holding this hearing. I believe that today's topic – restarting American research – is one of the most important issues we face at this moment. In September we heard from students and academics about the far-ranging impacts of COVID shutdowns. Those problems are only getting worse as Congress continues to ignore this problem in COVID relief bills.

American research universities support nearly 7 million jobs, and hundreds of thousands of those are directly supported by research funding. As research funding dries up, those jobs are threatened.

The research itself is also suffering. When COVID hit, labs across the country had to close or dramatically limit their operations to provide for safe social distancing. It's estimated that we're losing between 20 and 40 percent of our research output, which we absolutely cannot afford if we want to keep pace with China.

The Chinese Communist Party is determined to overtake us in the industries of the future—areas of science and technology that will drive economic growth and national security in the years to come. The longer our research remains stalled, the more likely it is that we'll fall behind our foreign adversaries on technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum information sciences, advanced manufacturing. The consequences of that would be devastating.

In addition to our loss of research, we're facing the loss of our researchers. Graduate students and post-docs are particularly vulnerable to lab closures right now. Research interruptions make it difficult to complete their studies and graduate on time. And universities have instituted hiring freezes, making it difficult to find work. Our STEM pipeline and future competitiveness could be irreparably damaged if we don't act quickly.

Unfortunately, we can't just flip a switch and restart the research work that's been halted by the pandemic. There's a cost involved in getting back up and running. Scientists

need to cultivate new samples, field researchers need to reacquire equipment, permits, and tools, and labs need to figure out how to safely use and sterilize expensive and delicate equipment.

For a time, research will cost more and take longer to conduct, and we need to plan for that. But our scientific progress is worth that investment. That's why I'm so disappointed that in the $4 trillion in COVID spending that Congress has already passed, not one cent has gone to research relief.

In the massive and partisan $1.9 trillion budget reconciliation proposal being considered this week, billions and billions of dollars are going to special interests that already have $1 trillion in unspent funding sitting in the Treasury from previous COVID packages. And yet in all that spending, only $600 million was allocated to helping the research industry recover from the pandemic. That's less than half a percent.

We've relied on American science and scientists to combat COVID, but we're not giving them the funding they need to resume the work that's been stopped by the pandemic. We need to act now.

I'm a proud cosponsor of the RISE Act, which would invest $25 billion in restarting American research. It provides the funding needed for researchers to complete work that was halted due to the pandemic. And it will allow federal science agencies to make awards to research universities, independent institutions, and national laboratories.

I'm also proud of the Supporting Early-Career Researchers Act Chairwoman Johnson and I re-introduced at the start of this Congress. This bill creates a new postdoctoral fellowship program at the National Science foundation to help support early career researchers.

Both of these bills enjoy strong bipartisan support, which is why I'm hopeful that we can move forward on them sooner rather than later. In the meantime, I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today. I'm looking forward to learning more about the challenges facing our research industry, and hear your ideas about how we can support American science and technology.

Thank you.