



## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas**

Full Committee Hearing—Building a Safer Antarctic Research Environment

*December 6, 2022*

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Good morning, Chairwoman Johnson, and thank you for holding this important hearing. Today's hearing shines a light on the concerning findings from the recent report commissioned by the National Science Foundation. The report found that there is a rampant culture of sexual harassment and assault in the remote research environment of Antarctica.

As I have said before, sexual harassment and gender discrimination are unacceptable in any situation. Period. It is wrong, it is illegal, and it is imperative that we end it.

The report we are discussing today details a troubling culture in the United States Antarctic Program.

This program operates three year-round research stations and provides logistical support for field research. Each year about 3,500 Americans are involved in the program's research and logistical activities. This includes teams of researchers, students, federal contractors, and military members.

Before diving into the report, I want to recognize that the research conducted on the ice is vitally important to the understanding of our planet, and to our nation's scientific leadership. The Antarctic presents a unique climate and environment that allow us to conduct research that cannot be performed anywhere else in the world – such as detecting neutrinos.

In 2009, I visited Antarctica to view the research facilities and environment. This trip provided me perspective on the importance of research being conducted, but also the environmental challenges of such remote field work, which are hard to understand without experiencing them first-hand. It is the stark isolation of the Antarctic environment that makes the report's findings particularly concerning.

According to the report, insufficient safety precautions, failures in broadband connectivity, and a lack of clear, transparent reporting structures have all contributed to an unsafe culture at the Antarctic research facilities.

The science community faces unique challenges when it comes to addressing harassment, particularly in remote field stations. Individuals working in science who are affected by sexual harassment and discrimination can suffer long-term harm to their education and careers, as well as to their mental and physical well-being.

While we can't lose sight of the individual cost, we must also think about the cost to our society and the economy as a whole. Engaging more women in STEM studies and careers is essential to American competitiveness.

If we want to have the strongest STEM workforce in the world, it is vital that our research environments foster a safe and accountable culture.

I want to acknowledge some of the efforts that have taken place at NSF since the report's release to improve the culture at the U.S. Antarctic Program.

NSF took positive steps by commissioning this report and seriously addressing its findings. I'm pleased that NSF plans to increase training and vetting for individuals going to the ice, and to establish a reporting hotline.

I urge NSF to remain attentive to these issues not only in Antarctica, but also at other remote field work environments.

The Science Committee has worked on a bipartisan basis to address issues such as harassment and discrimination in science. Products of our work were included in the recently passed CHIPS and Science Act.

However, the report we are discussing today demonstrates that there is still more work to do, particularly on addressing issues of harassment in the field.

Today's hearing will raise some difficult questions - many without easy answers.

How do we address these issues both fairly and safely? How do we navigate policies for remote field environments that are vastly different from each other? How do we navigate different command structures between NSF contractors, military members, and visiting scientists?

I hope our witnesses and other stakeholders can help us navigate these questions. I am looking forward to hearing more about how we can address the findings in the report to

ensure the Antarctic research program is safe for everyone living and working on the ice.

If I may take a moment of personal privilege. As this is our last hearing together, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairwoman for her leadership and partnership on this issue, as well as many others. It has truly been an honor to serve with you and I wish you all the best in your retirement.

Again, thank you Chairwoman Johnson for holding this hearing and I yield back the balance of my time.