

OPENING STATEMENT

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House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Subcommittee on Research & Technology

Subcommittee on Oversight

“A Review of Recommendations for NSF Project Management Reform”

February 4, 2016

Good morning. Thank you Chairwoman Comstock and Chairman Loudermilk for holding this hearing, and thank you to the panel for being here. This hearing is a good example of legitimate oversight that is in the best interest of both science and the taxpayer.

I believe we can all agree that planning, building, and managing large, complex, one-of-a-kind research facilities is a challenging task for even the most experienced organizations and project managers. However, such facilities are central to the National Science Foundation’s mission, “to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; and to secure the national defense.”

NSF is a precious resource for this nation. The merit-review process they use to select projects is emulated the world over. Therefore, we can have the highest level of confidence that the projects they fund, from telescopes and ecological observing networks, down to a \$50,000 grant to support a graduate student’s thesis, are all worthy of federal funding.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to discuss the best policies and practices to ensure success in NSF’s largest, most complex construction projects. NSF management and the NSF Inspector General have had many disagreements about what these best policies and practices may be. Such disagreements have played out before this Committee several times in the last few years. Overall, it is a healthy process to publicly air reasonable disagreements between reasonable people who all have good intentions. I applaud the IG for raising some important issues, and NSF for implementing several important reforms in response to the IG’s concerns.

However, I grew concerned that the back-and-forth was becoming less productive. Therefore, I was very supportive last year when Dr. Córdova collaborated with the National Science Board to commission an independent 3rd party review by the National Academy of Public Administration, or NAPA. The NAPA report represents a very thoughtful and thorough review of NSF’s use of cooperative agreements for large-scale investments. This morning we have an opportunity to hear from both NAPA and the NSF IG about their specific recommendations to enhance the agency’s oversight. We will also hear from NSF about their plans to continue to implement reforms to make the agency even more effective and efficient in carrying out its critical mission of scientific discovery and technological innovation.

Thank you, and I yield back.