

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

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
“Academic Research Regulatory Relief: A Review of New Recommendations”
September 29, 2016

Thank you Chairwoman Comstock and Ranking Member Lipinski for holding this hearing.

This is an important topic; one our Committee has been closely monitoring for a few years now. In pursuit of competitively awarded federal research grants, universities and their faculties are spending an unprecedented amount of resources and time bogged down by paperwork.

In response to this excessive burden on grant-seeking researchers and their institutions, I supported a recent bill introduced by Ranking Member Lipinski, and an earlier proposal by Chairwoman Comstock aimed at reducing the administrative burden on federally funded academic research while ensuring accountability and integrity in the conduct of this research. These bills represent a good effort to be directly responsive to the input and testimony of the true experts, including the panel before us today. I want to thank both Members for their leadership on this issue and the witnesses for their efforts.

Of course this is not a new issue. Research funding agencies and OMB have undertaken many collaborative efforts of their own to streamline grant requirements. However, despite years of such efforts, our work continues. It remains an ongoing challenge for us to strike a balance between conducting legitimate oversight of how scarce federal research dollars are spent, and allowing researchers the freedom to do what they do best. But we must keep at it.

University investigators push the boundaries of human knowledge in all areas of science and engineering. They also provide world-class training for the next generation of scientists, engineers, and technologists. The more time researchers spend dealing with mountains of paperwork, the less time they can dedicate to advancing science and molding the minds of our future leaders.

Today we will hear from experts in academia and the Government Accountability Office about the unintended consequences of well-intentioned regulatory requirements surrounding the process of awarding federal research grants.

I’m interested to hear from our panelists about where agencies can better streamline, harmonize, and coordinate their requirements across the research enterprise. I also want to hear what areas, if any, should be addressed legislatively, including updating old laws. When I think of our world-renowned scientists spending hours filling out forms and checking boxes, I can’t help but think that our federal dollars could be better spent.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here this morning. I look forward to the testimony and discussion, and I yield back.