

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

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

*“Head Health Challenge:*

*Preventing Head Trauma from Football Field to Shop Floor to Battlefield”*

December 13, 2017

Good morning, I would like to thank Chairwoman Comstock and Ranking Member Lipinski for holding today’s hearing on the NIST Head Health Challenge and the benefits and challenges of federal prize competitions.

I support the federal government’s use of prizes and challenges to spur innovation and technology breakthroughs. However, I want to begin with a brief comment about our larger commitment to research and development. I am deeply troubled that so many of my colleagues would support a tax bill that adds a trillion or more to the deficit while helping only the wealthiest among us, and at the same time repeatedly vote to cut funding for research and so many other critical investments in our future. Many of my colleagues would even make it impossible for any but the wealthiest Americans to pursue graduate degrees in STEM because of the proposed changes to the tax law.

While tough choices have to be made – and I am confident the overwhelming majority of my colleagues on my side of the aisle are willing to have those discussions - cuts to our federal R&D enterprise weaken the country’s ability to be a leader in innovation, economic growth, and job creation. No corporate tax cut will fix that. Our competitors have the same tough budget choices to make, yet they are not just maintaining their R&D investments, but increasing them.

While prizes and other types of challenges are not a substitute for the sustained investment and long-term national outlook that traditional federal R&D funding provides, they do have a role in how the government funds R&D. The prize authority granted to all federal agencies in the 2010 COMPETES Reauthorization stimulated a significant increase in agencies’ use of such competitions to incentivize more high-risk, high-reward research. Prizes also help agencies reach out to a broader partnership of researchers and innovators across all areas of science and technology. I am encouraged by indications that the current administration will continue support for prize competitions.

With several years of experience to build on, there are many lessons learned about how to best design and implement successful prize initiatives. There is also a new cadre of prize design expertise both in the government and the private sector. The NIST Head Health Challenge III appears to be a good model for public-private partnership and for the use of a challenge competition to spur innovation that had largely stalled. I look forward to hearing from NIST and the participants in this challenge about what worked well, and how any lessons learned might be

applied to future challenges. I also look forward to a broader discussion of how best to incorporate prizes into our broader federal R&D agenda.

I thank our witnesses for their testimony and I yield back.