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

Opening Statement of Research and Technology Subcommittee Ranking Member Jim Baird, PhD

Subcommittee on Research & Technology Hearing – *"The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on University Research"*

September 9th, 2020

Thank you, Chairwoman Stevens, for holding today's hearing. All of us on this Committee know the critical role our universities play in America's research enterprise.

They are the largest performers of basic research, which drives scientific and technological discovery in this country. They play a significant role in regional and national economic development, spurring countless start-ups and patent grants in a number of industries. And they educate and train our STEM workforce of tomorrow, which will be critical to our future competitiveness.

Over the last six months, our research universities have faced one of the greatest disruptions they have ever experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And yet, they have played a critical role in addressing the pandemic by conducting research and development to detect, defend, and eventually defeat COVID-19.

For example, at Purdue University, researchers are working on developing a handheld paper diagnostic device that will make COVID-19 detection fast, easy-to-use, and portable thanks to the inherent properties of paper. While COVID-19 related research was permitted to continue, tens of thousands of other labs across the country were forced to close or severely reduce their operations.

Throughout this summer, research institutions have been taking on the tremendous task of planning for how they can safely reopen and operate their research facilities. Adhering to proper social distancing practices is challenging in general, but especially when you consider the tight, confined spaces laboratory work is traditionally conducted in. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how their campuses are

dealing with these challenges and creating a “new normal” that allows the research enterprise on their campuses to rev back up.

Restarting the university research enterprise is particularly important to our future domestic STEM talent pipeline, especially early-career researchers and postdocs. The limited access to laboratories has restricted the research that postdocs can complete, in some cases causing their trajectories to change and creating uncertainty of when or if they will be able to complete their research and degree on time. Additionally, because many universities have instituted hiring freezes, there are great concerns that many postdocs will have to leave academia to find a job in the near term, which will be extremely damaging to the US’s domestic STEM talent and U.S. competitiveness. It is critical Congress takes steps to fight the threat of such a loss of STEM talent and “brain drain.”

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for taking the time to join us today, especially given it is the start of the school year and I expect, much more demanding than the start of a normal school year. I look forward to hearing your testimonies and a productive discussion.

I yield back the balance of my time.