Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

Research and Technology Subcommittee Hearing
Oversight and Examination of the National Science Foundation's Priorities for 2025 and Beyond

May 16, 2024

Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Stevens, for convening today's hearing. I'd also like to thank Dr. Panchanathan and Dr. Reed for appearing before the Subcommittee today to discuss the National Science Foundation's budget proposal for fiscal year 2025.

The NSF plays a vital role in advancing basic scientific knowledge and is the gold standard for basic research across the world. Today, seventy-four years after NSF's creation, that role has never been more important, as the United States faces enormous national and societal challenges, like cybersecurity threats, the growth of AI and automation, and the need for exceptional computing capacity.

The CHIPS and Science Act authorized critical investments and modernizations for NSF to address these challenges and to reinvigorate American innovation and leadership in science and technology.

It's been two years since we passed that law, so I'm eager to hear about NSF's progress in implementing it.

I'm particularly interested in hearing about NSF's progress in improving the geographic diversity of our scientific workforce. One of the goals of CHIPS and Science was to ensure all Americans have opportunities to participate and excel in STEM education and employment. The bill included a provision to expand and sustain access to high-quality STEM education for rural students. Capturing the geographic diversity of talent through investments across the nation is key to addressing the pressing need for a larger domestic STEM workforce.

I'd also like our conversation today to touch on the new Directorate for Technology, Innovation, and Partnerships (TIP). This directorate aims to take fundamental research funded by NSF and help apply those discoveries to solving national challenges and advancing emerging technologies. TIP will also foster new pathways for partnering with industry, including small businesses and startups.

As we expand NSF's work, we must also be mindful of the threats we face from abroad. We know that research theft and malign foreign influence are explicit strategies within the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) plan to become the global leader in science and innovation.

This Committee has carefully worked with federal research and national security agencies, as well as universities and other stakeholders, to determine the appropriate steps the federal government should take to stop this activity.

We have worked to find solutions that address problems identified by agencies and universities, without harming the open research system in the U.S. that has attracted the best scientists in the world. Much of this work is being done at the NSF through its Research Security Strategy and Policy activities. I look forward to hearing more about those today.

In addition to ensuring the integrity of our research and development enterprise, we need cutting-edge facilities for our federal scientists and researchers from academia and industry to conduct big science—research that can't be done in individual labs and requires massive equipment that industry cannot provide.

However, it is important to strike the necessary balance between the construction of new cutting-edge facilities, maintenance of current facilities, and decommissioning older facilities, to maintain responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

We also need to ensure the safety of the researchers and support staff at these facilities, particularly those in remote locations. Since the release of the Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention and Response report in 2022, this Committee has been investigating how NSF secures the safety of its employees, contractors, and awardees.

A safe working environment is imperative to the success of our global research endeavors. I appreciate both the Foundation and the Board's willingness to work with the Committee to address this and many other issues of importance to our scientific research enterprise.

As I mentioned at last year's budget hearing, I had deep concerns about the use of supplemental funding mechanisms for boosting investments at the Foundation. Unfortunately, this led to a feast and famine situation over the last two years. These were decisions made on a bipartisan basis.

I am not here to point fingers, but we must do everything we can to avoid this in the future. Innovation thrives on stable and predictable funding.

Again, I thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your testimonies and the discussion of NSF's FY2025 priorities.