

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

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Oversight
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
“NIST’s Physical Security Vulnerabilities: A GAO Undercover Review”
October 11, 2017

Good morning and welcome to our witnesses. Thank you to Chairman LaHood and Chairman Comstock for holding this important hearing on the state of physical security at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

NIST has had a number of serious problems with physical security in recent years. A rogue NIST police officer injured himself and damaged a NIST building in Gaithersburg while attempting to manufacture methamphetamine. Additionally, there was a troubling incident of an unauthorized individual wandering around a supposedly secure building at the NIST Boulder campus. These events spurred the Department of Commerce and NIST to review NIST’s security practices and attempt to improve physical security at NIST facilities. NIST requested independent assessments and developed an Action Plan based on the assessments. Under the current Acting Director, Dr. Rochford, NIST has continued to focus on improving its security culture.

While there may have been improvements to NIST’s security culture, there appears to be plenty of room for additional improvement. We learned from GAO’s just-released report that GAO agents were recently able to gain unauthorized access to areas of both the Gaithersburg, Maryland and Boulder, Colorado NIST campuses. It is particularly troubling that GAO’s efforts were so successful even after NIST had taken steps to improve security.

I look forward to hearing today from Acting Director Rochford about how NIST plans to respond to the GAO recommendations, including specific corrective actions and an approximate timeline for implementing those actions. I look forward to hearing from Ms. Casias about the Department of Commerce’s plans to address the bifurcated organizational structure of NIST physical security programs. I would also like to know what actions the Department of Commerce plans to take to ensure NIST security services operate at maximum effectiveness.

The protection of federal facilities, employees, contractors, and guests is of the utmost concern to me and this Committee. NIST specifically has valuable research and technology that must be protected as well. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how NIST security services can better meet its mission.

Thank you. I yield the balance of my time.