



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement by Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (R-Va.)

Scholars or Spies: Foreign Plots Targeting America's Research and Development

Chairwoman Comstock: Thank you Chairman Abraham for holding a hearing on this important and serious issue. It would be easy to think about the theft of information from American universities by foreign nations to be the topic of a modern day spy novel. But, in fact, it is a very real problem and sadly not a new one - my predecessor in the House, Rep. Frank Wolf, also worked on this important issue.

Academic institutions in the U.S. are valued for their openness, innovation and collaboration with domestic and international scientists. Our nation has long been a leader in science and technology research and development, and consequently, a magnet for foreign scholars and scientists seeking to learn from and collaborate with the best.

Unfortunately, various immoral actors have sought to exploit our openness to steal American ingenuity and innovation and undermine our system. Such thefts can enable foreign nations to save themselves billions in research and development costs and support technological advances that they may otherwise be unable to make on their own in order to gain an industrial or military advantage.

The FBI has been warning our academic community about these threats for years, while also urging measures be taken to guard against such activity. Since much of the stolen information comes from research funded by federal agencies, these nations are ultimately stealing ideas and innovations from American taxpayers like you and me - undermining the policy intent of federal funding for such research in the first place.

It is imperative that our academic institutions not close their eyes to the very real threat posed by foreign intelligence spies. They cannot be blinded by naiveté or ignorance when distinguishing between friend and foe.

But to be clear, the solution is not to shutter the doors of American universities and colleges to students, researchers and professors from foreign nations. The vast majority of scholars who come to the U.S. do so to work with our citizens on scientific discoveries and breakthroughs based on an open exchange of ideas to benefit the world. Finding an appropriate balance between scientific openness and security concerns is not new, nor is it easy.

As our world continues to be increasingly connected electronically, with more devices that can be used to covertly take pictures or scans, it is getting easier for foreign criminals to steal our information.

That is why hearings like this are important, as they shine a light on the problem and provide a venue to engage with stakeholders to identify potential solutions. I look forward to hearing what our witnesses have to say and hope they have some advice on how to better distinguish between scholar and spy, so that we may find the balance between open scientific collaboration and protecting America's research and development.

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