

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

House Committee on Science, Space & Technology
Subcommittee on Oversight
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
“Scholars or Spies: Foreign Plots Targeting America’s Research and Development”
April 11, 2018

Thank you Chairman Abraham and Chairwoman Comstock for convening this hearing today. Thank you to our panel of witnesses for joining us this morning.

America’s superior academic institutions have drawn the best and the brightest from around the world, and we have benefitted greatly from their contributions. From 1960 to 2017, foreign immigrants who settled in America won 81 Nobel Prizes in Chemistry, Medicine and Physics and in 2016, all six Americans who won Nobel Prizes in Chemistry, Physics and Economics were immigrants. Many of these immigrants came here as international students. Academic and intellectual openness are key to the success of American higher education and America’s leadership in science and technology.

However, we do face legitimate and serious threats from foreign adversaries. They are targeting our scientific innovations and advanced technologies whether they are at our government-funded laboratories, in our industries, or on the campuses of our universities. The theft or plunder of our critical technologies must be clearly addressed and prevented.

Our counterintelligence community must work hand-in-hand with research institutions to help mitigate the risk of these threats. These institutions need to be engaged in applying best practices in their approach to security and know how to identify acts of espionage. Professors and researchers should learn more about intelligence activities carried out through social engineering, networking, and conference participation. Now is not the time for the counterintelligence community to reduce its outreach to research colleges and universities. These bonds should be growing and strengthening. It is vital to our national security. However, we need to be careful that any security measures do not stifle the benefits our country realizes from legitimate international academic collaboration.

At the same time, we should also examine the reason why universities find international students so attractive. Part of the reason is economic. Nationwide, states have reduced levels of financial support to their respective public institutions of higher learning. Universities have responded by cutting financial aid and raising tuition and fees. International students who usually pay full tuition have helped make up this reduction in funding and have helped universities balance their books. This also makes the allure of foreign funding from students or foreign institutions, such as China’s Confucius Institute, that offer hundreds of thousands, and occasionally millions, of dollars for academic programming very enticing.

We need to make sure state and federal support for higher education meets the needs of these vital institutions. It is vital to our national security.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today. I yield the balance of my time.