



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON **SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:

*“Safeguarding Federal Research Funds:
The False Claims Act's Role in Combating Grant Fraud”*

June 24, 2026

Thank you, Chairman McCormick and Ranking Member Sykes. It's certainly odd to have a Justice Department witness before me today in the Science Committee – this topic and witness would be far more familiar to me in the Judiciary Committee. Nevertheless, I am more than happy to talk about fraud – I am just a bit surprised that my colleagues across the aisle feel that the “fraud” theme this month is a comfortable topic for anyone afraid of criticizing this Administration.

It's no exaggeration to say that during the Trump era, the fraud is coming from inside the house. It's hard to even comprehend the levels of graft emanating from the highest levels of our government: crypto schemes, kickback deals, politically connected equity stakes, the list goes on. Two weeks ago, the Secretary of Energy appeared to mislead this Committee by claiming partisan politics played no role in award terminations while DOJ, at nearly that exact moment, was admitting again, in Federal court, that the terminations were politically motivated – Members of this Committee might feel defrauded by that testimony. It would be a busy time for the fraud investigators at DOJ if the Department had any independence left. Sadly, we know it does not.

Of course, most of us do want to protect American taxpayer money from going toward fraudulent activities. The Offices of Inspector General represented here today are a key piece of that. OIGs within science agencies play a vital role in ensuring that federal research dollars and programs are protected from waste, fraud, and abuse – including, when appropriate, referring matters to the Department of Justice for prosecution under the False Claims Act. I can't say I understand the sense in focusing on just one specific law, when Inspectors General have many tools at their disposal to ensure that grant recipients are adhering to all relevant laws and procedures. But perhaps this focus makes more sense when we consider the new tack this Administration is taking with the False Claims Act.

As Ranking Member Sykes noted, the False Claims Act is now being used as a weapon in this Administration's war against what they refer to as “illegal DEI.” It is completely absurd to say that diversity initiatives are discrimination, but that is unfortunately the twisted political reality we are living in at the moment, care of President Trump and Stephen Miller. But let's not brush

past the claim that such efforts are “illegal.” To the contrary – Congress, and this Committee in particular, on a bipartisan basis, has spent decades enacting laws to promote diversity in STEM. This includes racial diversity, gender diversity, ethnic diversity, geographic diversity, institutional diversity – we know that expanding access to STEM opportunities is not only the right thing to do for underserved populations, but that it is the right thing to do if we want the most competitive STEM workforce possible.

This Administration could not possibly make it clearer that they do not, in fact, care about having a competitive STEM workforce. Our federal scientific enterprise has been wholly destabilized, through mass firings, chaotic and senseless reorganizations, the deletion of crucial government databases – the list goes on and on. Researchers across the country have had grants rescinded after winning them through highly competitive processes, *defrauding* them of duly awarded funding for paper-thin reasons such as misalignment with presidential priorities, or for simply having a politically unpopular institutional affiliation.

Just as the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology is not the place one should expect a well informed, germane conversation about the Department of Justice’s use of the False Claims Act, I have to imagine that the particulars of federal scientific grantmaking are out of place within the Department of Justice’s Commercial Litigation Branch. So perhaps this can be a learning experience for us all – Science Committee Members can delve into how the False Claims Act can be used to identify and prosecute grant fraud, and Ms. Jenny can learn about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our nation’s scientific enterprise. That would be a valuable hearing indeed.

Thank you, and I yield back.