

## Opening Statement

Research & Technology Subcommittee Markup  
*H.R. 4186, the FIRST Act*

Ranking Member Dan Lipinski (D-IL)  
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

March 13, 2014

Thank you Chairman Bucshon. Before I begin I want to send my congratulations out to France Cordova on her confirmation by the Senate last night to be the new director of the NSF; I look forward to working with her.

The original America COMPETES Act was enacted in 2007 in response to mounting evidence that the US was falling behind in its investments in basic research funded by the National Science Foundation, NIST, and the Department of Energy's Office of Science. I helped in writing that bill and served on the conference committee. In 2010 I authored the NSF bill which was subsumed into the COMPETES reauthorization. These are probably the two biggest highlights of my 10 years on this committee because of what that legislation did for the advancement of science and America's economic competitiveness in the world. The bill before us today, the FIRST Act, aims to build on this prior work - specifically at the NSF, NIST, and OSTP - so it's not surprising that I have a number of thoughts about this bill.

Since a principal concern of the original COMPETES bill was raising top line funding levels, it makes sense to begin discussion there. I have argued in the past and continue to believe that we should be setting an aspirational authorization level for science funding in this committee. Given the investments made by other nations, we cannot afford to be satisfied with the level of funding for the sciences in this country. To rest on our laurels, or to allow funding levels to stagnate too long will allow other nations to catch and surpass the US as the preeminent nation for scientific research.

However, I do understand the budget world we live in. The FIRST Act contains an increase in NSF's and NIST's top line numbers in FY15 greater than the increase in total discretionary spending allowed by the Bipartisan Budget Agreement. In addition, this bill's authorization for NSF represents a slightly larger increase than is contained in the President's budget request. So given the budget constraints in place I believe that the chairman has done what he could to arrive at good top line numbers in this bill, especially for NSF, although I would still like to see higher numbers.

That's why I am an original cosponsor of H.R. 4159 which was introduced by Ranking Member Johnson to reauthorize the America COMPETES Act for NSF, OSTP, NIST, and DOE. That bill reflects a bold vision for the future of the US scientific enterprise, and gives agencies funding certainty moving forward. I am proud to support it.

We will have time for further discussion on various aspects of the FIRST Act, but there are a few other areas I would like to highlight now. The first is the accountability language contained in section 106. I have worked with Chairman Smith and Chairman Bucshon on this language and I believe it represents a significant improvement over earlier drafts. In particular, the language puts the National Science Board in charge of developing the policy to implement the goals spelled out in that section, and gives both the Board and the Foundation ample time to implement any changes necessary.

While the language in section 106 does apply to each grant, the language also recognizes that no one can predict with certainty the eventual beneficial outcomes of any grant. Section 106 also asks Foundation officials to provide a written explanation of how grants meet broad goals. The Foundation should have no problem meeting this requirement once it implements its recently announced Transparency and Accountability Initiative. I believe that this could be tremendously useful in explaining to the general public the value of scientific research, and I encourage the Foundation to continue to implement this initiative. It can only help the US scientific enterprise for the general public to understand better why research proposals need federal funds. The Foundation does a fine job ensuring that taxpayer dollars are well spent, but improvements can always be made.

The other major area where I still have concerns is in the directorate level funding and specifically the large cut to the social sciences directorate. While I understand the desire to prioritize funding at federal agencies, the level of funding for the social sciences represents just over 3 percent of all funding at the Foundation and the existing funding is stretched alarmingly thin. Moreover, directorate-level funding of this type opens the door to meddling that could do lasting harm to the research funded by the Foundation.

There are other concerns with the text as introduced that I hope we will have an opportunity to address. I would highlight the cap on the cost of rotators at NSF, the provision on misrepresentation of research results, and the lack of provisions addressing priorities like manufacturing institutes or innovation activities at the Department of Commerce.

I hope that we are able to make further improvements as we consider this bill since this committee has a proud tradition of bipartisanship with members working across the aisle to improve bills; I hope we can build on that today. Again, I want to thank Chairman Bucshon for working with me to improve the bill, and I hope we can continue to make improvements both today and in full committee.