



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

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Media Contact: Zachary Kurz
(202) 225-6371

Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

An Overview of the Budget Proposal for the National Science Foundation for Fiscal Year 2017

Chairman Smith: Thank you, Chairwoman Comstock. And welcome Dr. Cordova and Dr. Arvizu.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) supports fundamental scientific basic research in the national interest that is critical to American innovation and competitiveness. Recently, this Committee heard testimony from the team of scientists who helped detect gravitational waves. The NSF's support for that project is a great example of what we can achieve when we pursue breakthrough science that is in the national interest.

Our challenge is to set funding priorities that ensure America remains first in the global marketplace of ideas and products while also being able to balance the government's budget.

However, the president's budget falls short of this goal. For example, the administration proposed increasing clean energy R&D funding at NSF by almost 40 percent in FY17 for a total of \$512 million as part of the President's Climate Action Plan. At the same time, funding for priority basic research in critical areas like biology, physics, chemistry, and computing remains flat.

Tight federal budget constraints require all taxpayer dollars to be spent on high value science in the national interest.

Unfortunately, NSF has funded a number of projects that do not meet the highest standards of scientific merit – from a \$500,000 grant to help amateurs create a video game called “Relive Prom Night” to \$1.5 million for studying pasture management in Mongolia.

I want to recognize Dr. Córdoba for the steps NSF has taken to improve accountability. I also appreciate the National Science Board's acknowledgement that the NSF should be accountable in its grant funding decisions.

NSF's transparency and accountability policy implemented last year acknowledges the need for NSF to clearly communicate in non-technical terms the research projects it funds.

The policy emphasizes that the title and abstract for each funded grant should serve as the public justification for NSF funding. It should explain how the project contributes to the national interest and is consistent with the NSF mission, as set forth in the 1950 legislation that created the Foundation.

At a hearing last year before this Committee, Dr. Córdova testified that this new NSF policy reflects requirements in the Scientific Research in the National Interest Act. The House passed this bill last month, which requires NSF to publish a justification for each funded grant that sets forth the project's scientific merit and national interest. There has been a noticeable improvement in the clarity of many grant abstracts and project titles we have reviewed recently. That being said, there is still work to be done. I encourage Dr. Cordova and the NSF program staff to redouble their efforts to make sure each new taxpayer-funded research grant includes a non-technical description of its potential scientific importance.

The national interest criteria set forth in the legislation encourages pioneering research in all of the sciences. Taxpayer funded projects should increase economic competitiveness, advance Americans' health and welfare, develop a world-class STEM workforce, increase public understanding of science, promote partnerships between academia and industry, support the national defense, and further the progress of science in the United States.

I hope to hear how implementation of the new policies can be improved and will actually incorporate the criteria from the House-passed National Interest bill so that a project's benefits are clearly communicated to earn the public's support and trust. Researchers should embrace the opportunity to better explain to the American people the potential value of their work.

I also want to mention that this Committee has had two bills signed into law within the last year– the READ Act, to further dyslexia research, and the STEM Education Act, to define STEM to include computer science.

NSF plays a critical role in the implementation of both bills and I hope to hear more about how NSF plans to address those priorities starting this year. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today and yield back.

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