

Statement of Rep. Summer Lee (PA-12)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Member Day Hearing, July 19, 2023

Chairman Frank Lucas and Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss opportunities for this body to be more reflective of the nation it serves. This committee strives for excellence in enhanced innovation and problem-solving through the funding and direction we provide these agencies to carry out groundbreaking research.

For too long we have failed to prioritize, or even acknowledge, the vast contributions that the Black community and other minority groups have made towards scientific discovery and innovation. Well-documented gaps exist between the number of *recognized* works produced by women compared to men in science, bearing significant consequences for the retention and promotion of women¹. Black and brown bodies have for centuries been used to save the lives of others while losing their own.

For example, the genetic material of Henrietta Lacks, taken without consent, has been studied and used ***globally*** in major developments on vaccine production, cancer treatments, fertility treatments, and *numerous* other applications.

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-022-04966-w.pdf>

Katherine Johnson's hand-calculated orbital equations, where electronic machines failed, helped NASA safely send an astronaut into space and back to Earth. Her coauthored report on orbital spaceflight just 2 years prior was the 1st time a woman in the Flight Research Division received credit as an author of a research report.

This highlights the ethical imperative for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) in the scientific field's unbiased pursuit of knowledge without discrimination, promoting fairness and equal opportunities for all. The 118th Congress has demonized all things remotely related to DE&I; it's not surprising seeing that one of my "*colleagues*" just last week referred to Black people as "colored people" on the House floor.

When I look up at the walls of this committee room and only see one person who looks like me, I feel reminded that many people, for a long time, did not believe that people like me belong here. (Point to portrait)

Eddie Bernice Johnson, is the 1st and *only* woman African American to ever chair this committee. She dedicated 40 years of her life to public service, and her work championed STEM education and diversity. Fittingly, her contributions helped generational investment through the CHIPS & Science Act become law. She leaves a legacy of providing access to career paths and opportunities in STEM for countless Americans across the country. I look at her work and I am inspired to make sure some more diverse portraits are hung in this room, be it myself or others.

Diversity fosters a wider range of ideas and approaches, leading to more innovative solutions and better problem-solving capabilities in the

scientific community. As legislators who are entrusted with driving the policies that will help shape the nation for years to come, we are better positioned to serve our constituents, and the country, by listening to individuals with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

Last month, I introduced and withdrew an amendment, at the request of Chairman Lucas, that encapsulates my legitimate concerns on the disparate impacts AI technologies have on people that look like me. Chairman Lucas and this committee have been supportive of addressing these issues, and I am eager to discuss what progress has been made on this, and any way myself or my staff can be supportive of that work. I also look forward to circulating and presenting a letter to Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Lofgren highlighting the need for improved representation in the witnesses we invite to testify before us.

The scientific community serves the public interest through space, science, and technology. Inviting a more diverse pool from the scientific community ensures that research questions, methodologies, and findings are more reflective of the American population that research aims to serve.

To inspire the next generation of innovators, we must commit to fully embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) – fundamental

principles that hold immense significance in the scientific field. These cannot be mere buzzwords.

Many of my colleagues on this committee have had more experience on analyzing scientific topics than me, but my constituents sent me to this seat to address the unique, everyday needs and challenges faced by communities in Western Pennsylvania. You don't need to be an astrophysicist to be a member of this committee, - this is a good thing. The work this committee does has an impact on people of all creeds and backgrounds, regardless of your last name or alma mater.

When I chose to be a member of the Space, Science, and Technology Committee, I did so to help create a more equitable and just society specially within the realm of STEM. Embracing DEI initiatives and ensuring diverse representation among congressional witnesses will be a crucial step this committee can take towards creating a more inclusive, innovative, and ethical future for everyone.