

OPENING STATEMENT

THE HONORABLE RALPH HALL (R-TX) **Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology**

“Funding for the America COMPETES Act in the FY2009 Administration Budget Request”

Thursday, February 14 at 10:00 am
2318 Rayburn Office Building

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Dr. Marburger. It's good to have you before us this morning.

I am sure that we can all agree that striking that delicate balance between adequately funding our nation's priorities while at the same time exhibiting fiscal restraint to reduce the deficit continues to be a challenge. Likewise, I know we also are all in agreement that if we are to remain the world leader in competitiveness and innovation, we must make the appropriate investments in research, development, technology, and math and science education.

I am pleased to see that the FY2009 Budget Request gets us back on a path to double the funding for physical sciences and engineering at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and the Office of Science at the Department of Energy (DOE). Building on the President's American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI) and Republican led efforts in the last Congress, we stepped up to the plate and enacted the America COMPETES Act last year, authorizing increased levels of funding for these agencies. So, I am sure you shared my surprise and disappointment when I realized that our friends over on the Appropriations Committee did not see fit to adequately fund these agencies for this fiscal year. The funding they provided was not only 12 percent below the level that we authorized in COMPETES, it was 6 percent below the President's FY2008 Budget Request levels. This is simply unacceptable. The returns that we receive from our investments in these agencies far exceed the costs. As I have stated before, whether it is fighting the war on terror abroad or at home, ending our dependence on foreign oil, or inspiring our children to enter high-tech fields so that the United States can continue to push the frontiers of innovation, these agencies have critical roles to play. The budget before us today keeps us moving forward in this regard.

Dr. Marburger, I am pleased to see boosts in funding for several science programs such as the Advanced Energy Initiative (AEI) at DOE, which works with solar, biomass and hydrogen to move us towards a more secure energy future. But, I do have a couple of areas of concern with this budget. There seem to be a number of places where the President has repeatedly cut other important science and technology programs, in effect robbing Peter to pay Paul. The Manufacturing Extension Program (MEP) at NIST, for example, is significantly cut or cancelled each year. And each year, Congress fully funds the program. This year again, MEP is zeroed out in the budget.

As for NASA, while the agency has had modest budget increases, they have been insufficient to meet the goals laid out in the President's Vision for Space Exploration announced at the beginning of 2004. This has resulted in less ambitious development schedules for the shuttle's replacement, and this year's budget request does not keep up with inflation. In two years time, we will find ourselves in a situation in which the United States will be entirely reliant on other nations for access to our multi-billion dollar space station. I am concerned that America's preeminence in space may be jeopardized if we do not narrow the gap between retiring the space shuttle and developing the Orion and Ares launch vehicles.

Before yielding back to the Chairman, let me say a word about STEM education in this year's request. I recognize and support the President's efforts to improve our STEM education needs through the Department of Education. There should be more focus there; however, I have great concern that this budget does not likewise reflect the STEM education responsibilities at the National Science Foundation, particularly an expanded Robert Noyce Scholarship program.

Thank you for coming up here today. I look forward to your testimony, and I yield back the balance of my time.