



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

Floor Statement

Statement by Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

on H.R. 2027, the *MSI STEM Achievement Act*

May 18, 2021

The United States is facing grave challenges on many fronts. We are only beginning to emerge from a global pandemic, with the outlook still uncertain. Our critical infrastructure, our Federal agencies, and companies across all sectors are being hacked. We are racing to mitigate the destructive effects of climate change. Our economic competitiveness is threatened as competitors like China invest heavily in science and technology.

To solve these problems, we need a cadre of trained scientists and engineers pushing the boundaries of what we know and what we can achieve. So far, we have led the world in science and innovation with a STEM workforce that does not come close to representing the diversity of our nation. When a Black woman, Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, is at the center of developing the mRNA vaccine that is helping us conquer the pandemic, we treat it as exceptional, instead of expected. If we maintain such a narrow perspective on who should be a scientist, if we continue to leave behind so much of our nation's brainpower, we cannot succeed.

The good news is, we have highly successful models for increasing the diversity of STEM graduates. Minority serving institutions have long played a critical role in training and educating students of color in STEM fields. Student bodies at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are the most diverse in the nation. These and other minority serving institutions (MSIs) offer access to STEM education and a pathway to research or other STEM careers to students who might otherwise have limited opportunities. MSIs employ tailored initiatives, policies, and practices that meet students where they are, academically, financially, and socially, while moving students toward higher levels of academic achievement.

For instance, HBCUs play an outsized role in educating African American STEM graduates. While HBCUs make up only 3 percent of the nation's colleges and universities, they graduate 32 percent of African American students earning bachelor's degrees in the physical sciences, 29 percent in mathematics, and 27 percent in the biological sciences. One quarter of African Americans with STEM PhDs earned their bachelor's degree at an HBCU.

MSIs have a proven track record of recruiting, retaining, and graduating underrepresented minority students with STEM degrees. However, more investment and outreach is needed to enable MSIs to fully realize their potential to contribute to the STEM workforce. The *MSI STEM Achievement Act* provides for increased transparency, accountability, and accessibility of Federal STEM education and research funding for MSIs. The bill directs the Government Accountability Office to compile an inventory of programs targeted to MSIs and make recommendations for how agencies can increase competitiveness of MSIs in such programs. The bill also supports research on the challenges and successes MSIs have had in contributing to the STEM workforce, including support for MSI Centers of Innovation to help scale up successful practices pioneered at MSIs. Finally, the bill requires the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to issue policy guidance for Federal science agencies to improve outreach to MSIs in order to increase awareness of and competitiveness in agency funding opportunities.

I want to thank Rep. Waltz for joining me in introducing this bipartisan legislation. I also want to thank the 24 organizations and institutions that have endorsed H.R. 2027.

MSIs have charted a course to developing the diverse STEM workforce we need to ensure continued leadership in science and innovation. Let us empower these institutions, and others, to build on that success. I look forward to seeing a companion in the Senate and working with my colleagues in both bodies to get this legislation enacted.