



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing:
Brain Drain: Rebuilding the Federal Scientific Workforce

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Good morning. I would like to begin by welcoming back Chairman Foster as the Chairman of the Investigations & Oversight Subcommittee for the 117th Congress, and by welcoming Ranking Member Obernolte to the Subcommittee. I look forward to working with both of you on a vigorous oversight agenda to strengthen federal scientific research and promote the advancement of American science and technology.

The subject of today's hearing is critically important for the future of research and development in this country. Career scientists in the Federal Government are instrumental in shaping America's scientific priorities, funding cutting-edge research, and ensuring that policies are crafted on the basis of the best available science. These public servants frequently dedicate their entire careers to essential scientific functions as varied as supporting basic research, protecting clean air and water, and preparing the country for outbreaks of infectious disease. As a nation, we ignore them at our peril.

But in recent years, due to political and budgetary pressures, the federal scientific workforce has struggled. Too many career scientists have decided to leave. Fewer federal scientists means less research, slower grant processes, less mentoring for young scientists, and less specialized expertise. It means less informed policymaking and weaker regulatory enforcement. This is a problem for the agencies who employ scientists, the academic and private-sector researchers who work with them, and the American people, who benefit from their knowledge and dedication. We need to understand the implications of these staff departures for federal science agencies so that we can properly address them.

Additionally, it is imperative that we continue to promote greater diversity in the federal STEM workforce. Under my leadership, this Committee has been a strong advocate for increasing the opportunities available to women and communities of color to enter STEM professions. It is vital for the future of American science that the nation's scientific institutions encourage greater participation among historically underrepresented groups, because our strength lies in our diversity and broader perspectives lead to better science. The Federal Government must be a leader in this effort, and the federal scientific workforce must reflect the diversity of the country

that it represents. Advancing diversity and inclusion will be key to revitalizing the federal scientific workforce in the years to come.

It is a longstanding priority of this Committee to strengthen the scientific capabilities of the Federal Government. A major part of those capabilities is a robust scientific workforce. We must look for ways to boost the ranks of career scientists, and to encourage scientists across the country, from all regions and backgrounds, to join the effort. I appreciate the work of our distinguished panelists in furthering this goal, and I look forward to hearing your perspectives.

Thank you. I yield back.