



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Research & Technology Subcommittee Hearing:
Reauthorization of the National Institute of Standards and Technology

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Thank you Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Member Baird for holding this morning's hearing to inform our reauthorization of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. I want to welcome and thank Dr. Copan for his testimony. We recognize that it can be challenging for the heads of our nation's great science agencies to come before Congress to defend indefensible budgets. The purpose of this hearing is not to dissect the Administration's myopic and harmful budget request for NIST. Rather, it is to highlight the critical work of NIST to advance our nation's economic competitiveness, national security, and wellbeing.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology plays a critical role across so many aspects of our economy and society. Many of the efforts that this budget seeks to reduce or eliminate are activities that our constituents have never heard of, but that are essential nonetheless.

This includes everything from improving the reliability of forensic evidence used to prosecute dangerous criminals, to ensuring our health care providers have accurate information about our DNA when giving us life and death medical advice, to protecting factory floor workers from malfunctioning equipment.

NIST's support for research and standards for disaster resilience also helps protect communities across the nation.

Through its Urban Dome program, the agency is developing methods to reliably measure greenhouse gas emissions so we can develop smart climate mitigation strategies.

I am sure many of you have heard of NIST's work in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. NIST also does important work to develop digital identity management systems, protect voting machines, enable the deployment of smart electricity grids, and secure our manufacturing supply chains.

One of the important programs that I want to highlight is NIST's work operating the National Advanced Spectrum and Communications Test Network. For the last few years, this Committee has been conducting oversight of FCC plans for the 24 Gigahertz band that could degrade the accuracy of weather forecasting.

The dispute between NOAA, NASA, and FCC is largely due to disagreement over the methodologies of competing studies. It is my belief that NIST, with its reputation for neutrality and scientific rigor, could use NASTCN to help other government agencies better understand spectrum interference.

Finally, I echo the comments of my colleagues that NIST cannot be expected to carry out any of this work in decades-old facilities, some of which are unsafe, none of which are worthy of the world class scientists who populate them. It speaks to their dedication to the mission of NIST that these scientists remain at the agency instead of moving to the modern labs and higher salaries in industry.

I want to express my gratitude to all of NIST's employees and to Dr. Copan, whose leadership has helped to prop up agency morale through challenging times.

As this Committee considers a reauthorization for NIST, we must ensure that the understandable excitement around industries of the future does not overshadow all of the other important work going on at NIST and the critical facilities that enable that work. In closing, I want to thank Dr. Copan once again and I look forward to the discussion.