



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

Floor Statement

Statement by Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
on H.R. 2528, the STEM Opportunities Act

Mister Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2528, the STEM Opportunities Act of 2019.

I want to thank Ranking Member Lucas for joining me in introducing this bill. I also want to thank the bill cosponsors on both sides of the aisle and the endorsing organizations.

This bill has been a long time coming. Over a decade ago, in 2007, I introduced an early version of this legislation in response to the National Academies report entitled “Beyond Bias and Barriers”. This report was a call to action to address the biases and outdated institutional structures in universities that perpetuate the significant underrepresentation of women in many STEM fields. The report made clear that it is not a lack of talent, but external factors like limited access to support and campus resources, pay disparity, bias, and discrimination that have hindered the advancement of women in academic STEM careers. The National Academies is conducting a follow-up study under the leadership of former NASA astronaut, Dr. Mae Jemison. While progress has been made, the fact remains that women are woefully underrepresented at all levels of STEM studies and in STEM careers. We need action and we need bold leadership.

Women already comprise 50 percent of the population. By the year 2050, racial and ethnic minorities will also comprise 50 percent of our nation’s population. Many of these groups are woefully underrepresented in STEM fields. Our nation will not continue lead in science and innovation if we do not tap into all of the talent this nation has to offer. While there are unique challenges for different groups underrepresented in STEM, there are also many common themes, and many common solutions.

Eventually, I combined my legislation focused on the advancement of women in STEM with another piece of legislation focused on underrepresented minorities in STEM. That combined legislation became the *STEM Opportunities Act*. *The STEM Opportunities Act* addresses both the uniqueness and the similarity in challenges and solutions.

Over the years, I have updated this legislation to incorporate new expert recommendations and stakeholder feedback to reflect emerging needs. *The STEM Opportunities Act of 2019* provides for research and demographic data collection to better understand the participation and career trajectories of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM research careers. The bill

directs the Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop consistent policies at Federal science agencies to (1) minimize the effects of implicit bias in the grant review process; (2) help universities identify and address barriers for women and underrepresented minorities in STEM research careers; and (3) to accommodate the needs of grant recipients who have caregiving responsibilities. The bill also directs the National Science Foundation to award grants to support computer science education at the nation's tribal colleges and universities.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.