



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

Floor Statement

Statement by Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

on H.R. 144, the *Supporting Early Career Researchers Act*

May 18, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous disruptions to the scientific enterprise. The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held two hearings to explore the challenges and learn what is needed to help the scientific community recover. Researchers and their students were kept away from the lab, significantly slowing progress on the research and limiting opportunities for mentoring. Research facilities were shuttered and conferences cancelled. Travel restrictions resulted in missed field campaigns and kept international students from joining their research groups on campus. These setbacks affected researchers and students across all scientific disciplines. Women and historically underrepresented groups were particularly affected. While the full cost of the pandemic in terms of lost research is not yet known, the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that NIH alone lost \$16 billion of research and the Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF) put the figure at \$3 billion for NSF-funded research.

I am deeply concerned that these disruptions will have long-lasting consequences for the research ecosystem. One of the most urgent challenges we face is the potentially irreversible loss of research talent. The financial pressures of the pandemic forced many universities to institute hiring freezes for faculty positions. The STEM faculty job market contracted as much as 70 percent in 2020. Early career researchers are the most vulnerable to this contraction, even if it is not permanent. Too many are currently in limbo. After years of hard work and an enormous investment of resources to train these scholars, we simply cannot afford to let them slip through the cracks. If we are to keep ahead of our global competitors and ensure our security and prosperity, we must act now to mitigate a loss of human capital that would take decades to recoup.

The *Supporting Early-Career Researchers Act* provides a bridge to help recent Ph.D. graduates stay on their chosen career path as they weather this turbulent period. The legislation establishes a two-year, \$250 million agency-wide early career fellowship pilot program at NSF. This will enable two cohorts of 1,600 fellows working in all STEM disciplines to carry out their research at the U.S. institutions of their choosing.

More than 30 organizations have endorsed H.R. 144. I want to thank Ranking Member Lucas for joining me in introducing this bill and bringing it to the House Floor. I look forward to working with my colleagues in both bodies to see it enacted and funded quickly.