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

Congresswoman Bill Foster (D-IL)

Conference Kickoff Meeting
May 12, 2022

Good morning, all, and thank you to Chairwoman Cantwell and Chairwoman Johnson for leading this meeting today. I am very proud to be a part of the House Delegation on this conference committee, particularly in my role as a member of the Science Committee.

I was very involved with the Dodd-Frank Conference Committee a decade ago, where I ended up 10-for10 in getting my amendments in to the House-passed version, of which seven survived the final conference with the Senate. I found the transparency of conferencing to be a very useful mechanism to focus on essential elements while stripping out extraneous or counterproductive provisions, and Dodd-Frank has survived the test of time.

As Congress' token PhD physicist, with a decades-long career at our national labs, my focus will be on locking in an expansion of our nation's efforts in basic research, while avoiding measures that risk diluting investment in peer-reviewed, competitively awarded basic research, unless new funding is actually appropriated for new missions. We must also avoid congressional micromanaging of scientific priorities and leave that to the experts.

On the House Science Committee, we've worked hard over this Congress to craft and pass several bipartisan reauthorization bills—including for the DOE Office of Science, the NSF, and NIST. These bills make up a significant portion of the House's America COMPETES Act and are fundamental to the underlying purpose of this legislation. The final version of this legislation should fix the chronic underfunding of our science agencies, and actually give them the chance to pursue the level of research that will firmly re-establish our leadership in innovation. It may not be enough to simply double the nominal science budget; if we truly wish to re-emphasize the importance of federal science, we should be aiming to double the science budget as a percentage of GDP.

As someone who as a teenager started a high-tech manufacturing company that now provides 1200 good manufacturing jobs, and has kept those jobs in the Midwest, all the while competing successfully with offshore manufacturers, and dealing with offshore supply chain issues for over four decades, I hope that we settle on realistic and workable proposals in the tech transfer areas. Each of our science agencies has an area in which it is particularly capable; the NSF specializes in basic research, the DOE Office of Science serves in a co-equal role with an emphasis on applied and translational research, and NIST provides standard-setting and guidance. Therefore, one of the fundamental questions before this Committee will be the role of the new directorate at the NSF. Based on significant feedback from the science community, it is my belief that, while

this new directorate will prove valuable, the basic science role of the NSF must be protected. I am particularly supportive of language in the House bill which essentially sets up a funding firewall, preventing funding from being diverted from the existing directorates to the new directorate. This will allow the NSF room to explore new areas, without endangering its expertise in basic research.

I am also proud of the funding levels in the House bill for the DOE's Office of Science to continue its excellent work in applied and translational research. And as we determine the funding levels for our science agencies, I am also looking forward to ensuring that science funding is distributed in a fair, equitable, and responsible manner.

Finally, as perhaps Congress' only chip designer, and as someone who has led teams of chip designers, some of the most brilliant of which were born abroad, some of the most significant feedback I have received on this bill relates to visas and green cards for international graduate students who studied in the United States. I have heard from industry and academia about the importance of making sure that these intelligent minds, armed with American degrees, are able to stay in our country and use their talents to contribute to our economy. The America COMPETES Act both gives graduate STEM students a path to a green card and allows student visa holders to have dual intent, meaning they could stay in the U.S. while their green card application was pending. This area will be fundamental in ensuring our competitiveness and leadership in science and research into the future and will be one of my priorities.

I look forward to working with you all on these and the other issues in this legislation, and I yield back.