



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

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Examining NIST's Priorities for 2025 and Beyond

May 22, 2024

Thank you for holding today's hearing, Mr. Chairman. I would also like to welcome our distinguished witness Dr. Locascio.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has a critical mission to support our innovation and industrial competitiveness by advancing measurement, standards, and technology. Because of its sterling reputation and ability, this small but mighty agency has been assigned leadership roles in several high-profile national priorities.

NIST has been charged to implement the \$39 billion CHIPS for America program to help reshore American semiconductor manufacturing. They are also the lead on the \$11 billion CHIPS R&D program that Congress enacted along with the incentives program. NIST is at the forefront of our efforts in national priorities like artificial intelligence, quantum information science and engineering, and biotechnology.

What is less well known is the myriad of NIST's other critical activities that support industrial competitiveness, make our economy function, and protect people's safety and livelihoods. The stock market operates based on NIST's extremely precise clocks, as does much of our critical infrastructure and many of our industries. The buildings we live and work in were designed to codes and standards that NIST helped to inform. NIST plays an important role in understanding how fire interacts with the built environment at the wildfire-urban interface. They are leading the effort to strengthen the credibility of forensic science and standards. NIST also has an immense library of standard reference materials that industry and regulators depend on, down to the peanut butter in your kitchen cabinet.

NIST further supports American companies across our economy by helping our companies maintain U.S. leadership in international standards setting. We know that China is ramping up its own participation in international standards setting forums with the goal of superseding us.

Instead of supporting this critical agency and putting our money where our mouth is when it comes to competition with China, Congress cut NIST's budget and seems poised to do so again

this year. NIST received a devastating 10 percent cut in the fiscal year 2024 budget—affecting programs throughout the agency. They have already let go of students and postdoctoral researchers and have started to scale back critical programs.

In addition, for the last 20 years, NIST's infrastructure challenges have been steadily increasing and, despite the work of this Committee, Congress has not funded any real solution to the problem. Now the infrastructure issues are coming to a head, decreasing the effectiveness of the agency, damaging staff morale, and in some cases putting those staff in real danger. For the first time this year, the cost it would take to address the maintenance backlog at NIST will eclipse how much money the agency spends on its research portfolio.

NIST's role can be abstract so I will close by giving you a real example of what we are losing. NIST runs the National Vulnerability Database, which is used by governments and companies all over the world to remove cybersecurity bugs and protect everyone's computers. The NVD is a critical public good. However, the budget cuts driven by the majority party over the last few years caused NIST to scale back how it processes vulnerabilities that go into the NVD. There is now a backlog of over 6000 vulnerabilities—and we don't know how harmful they are. While I am confident in NIST's plan to address this issue in the coming months, we in Congress cannot lose sight of how our disfunction affects programs that the public relies on for their safety, security, and overall well-being.

I thank Director Locascio for coming before us today and the other public servants at NIST for their steadfast work.

I yield back.