

OPENING STATEMENT  
**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
*“An Overview of the National Science Foundation Budget Proposal for FY 2019”*  
March 15, 2018

Thank you Chairman Smith for holding this hearing, and welcome back Dr. Córdova and Dr. Zuber. I am pleased that we have both of you here this morning to help us understand the Fiscal Year 2019 budget request for the National Science Foundation and the potential impact of this request on NSF’s ability to help support U.S. leadership in science.

Funding for NSF peaked in 2010 at \$7.7 billion. In the years since then, the budget has stagnated at or below \$7.5 billion. That is the case despite the Obama Administration requesting increases every year. In stark contrast, last year, the Trump Administration proposed to cut NSF by 11 percent. And this year, until Congress passed the budget agreement, the proposed cut was closer to 30 percent. This Administration has demonstrated time and again how little they value science.

Given these trends, most of us are relieved when the NSF budget remains flat rather than cut. However, flat is a decline in real dollars, and it represents a terribly low standard by which to judge our nation’s standing in science and technology. We will hear in Dr. Zuber’s testimony how other countries are doubling-down on their investments in R&D while we just cut.

Having said that, I applaud Dr. Córdova and your team at NSF for being as bold and forward-looking as you could be given the constraints imposed upon your budget by the White House. I will highlight just a few items of interest or concern that I hope we can discuss further in this hearing.

Advancing science to solve our national and global challenges increasingly depends on teams of scientists from different disciplines coming together in what is now commonly known as convergent research. However, for generations, universities and the National Science Foundation itself have been organized around disciplines. While advances in these core disciplines do and must continue, this organizational structure has created stovepipes and inhibited convergent research. In the FY 2019 budget request, NSF takes a big leap to transcend those traditional boundaries through dedicated funding for its 10 Big Ideas. In that respect, this is an exciting budget proposal. However, having been forced into a zero-sum choice, the agency had to make cuts elsewhere, namely to the core research programs and to education and training programs at all levels. These trade-offs merit further discussion before we can be comfortable that the benefits outweigh the potential harm.

This budget also represents the first time that the agency is singling out one of its research directorates for a disproportionate cut. While every other directorate is nearly flat, the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE) would be cut by 11 percent. I do not doubt this steep cut was dictated from the White House. However, this ongoing devaluing of the role of SBE in meeting our national challenges could have damaging consequences. I look forward to hearing from Dr. Córdova and Dr. Zuber on what steps NSF will take to mitigate this harm.

I am pleased to see the Antarctic Infrastructure Modernization for Science – or AIMS – project in the request, along with the proposal for a mid-scale research infrastructure program. I look forward to hearing more about both of these proposals.

Finally, as I alluded to earlier, while there are a few bright spots in education and broadening participation funding, I am concerned about the overall cuts to education in this budget. Education and training programs across the Research account would be cut by nearly 25 percent. Proven programs such as the Noyce Teacher Scholarship program, Research Experiences for Undergraduates, and the Graduate Research Fellowships would all receive steep cuts. NSF has a dual mission of research and education. We cannot afford to back away from our commitment to either.

I thank Dr. Córdova and Dr. Zuber for being here this morning to help us examine these issues and concerns in more detail, and I again thank the Chairman for holding this important hearing. I yield back.