

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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February 28th, 2025

Darío Gil
National Science Board Chair
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Chairman Gil,

We write to you with great urgency to request you exercise your important role as a member of the National Science Board and do everything in your power to stop the ongoing destruction of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Since January 20, 2025, NSF has made multiple decisions that indicate it is taking extreme measures to go above and beyond compliance with orders from the Trump Administration and from the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). This includes the freezing of grant funding for nearly a week,¹ a post hoc review of active awards,² and the firing of probationary employees and expert appointees that captured individuals who had not been targeted by DOGE.³ The decisions that were made are in direct conflict with NSF's mission, and the reductions to its already-stretched-thin workforce will decimate the agency's ability to support critical science. Agency plans for the next round of firings are due on March 13, 2025, and it is imperative that you speak out to ensure that NSF does not further damage itself and its reputation.

We request that you and your colleagues immediately undertake a review of NSF's capacity to fulfill its mission as described in the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; and to secure the national defense." On February 10, 2025, the United States Agency for International

¹ Jonathan Lambert, "National Science Foundation says it will unfreeze grant money after court order," *NPR*, February 3, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/03/nx-s1-5285382/national-science-foundation-says-it-will-unfreeze-grant-money-after-court-order>

² Carolyn Y. Johnson, Scott Dance, Joel Achenbach, "Here are the words putting science in the crosshairs of Trump's orders," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2025/02/04/national-science-foundation-trump-executive-orders-words/>

³ Corbin Hiar, "'Cowardliness at the top': Science agency staff revolt over cuts," *Politico*, February 20, 2025, accessed on: <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/20/inside-national-science-foundation-firings-00204763>

Development's (USAID) Office of Inspector General (OIG) issued an advisory notice describing the incredible damage being done to humanitarian assistance programs. This included an assessment of the impact of staff layoffs that had been announced just days before, which at the time were under a court-ordered pause.⁴ This is the level of expedience and analysis that is required to ensure NSF leadership – and the public – is clear-eyed about the damage that has been done and that will continue to be done under the Trump administration.

On February 26, Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought issued a memorandum to all agency heads with guidance on implementing the executive order demanding reductions in force. The memo states that the plans should drive “the highest-quality, most efficient delivery of their statutorily-required functions.” While DOGE appears to be measuring efficiency by the number of civil servants fired, you know that NSF is an incredibly efficient agency that spends only 5% of its budget on operations and award management.⁵ To give just one example of the impact that has already occurred, based on documentation reviewed by the Committee, over three dozen program directors were fired. Without these subject matter experts to coordinate merit review panels and manage awards, the grantmaking process in these program directors' portfolios will grind to a halt. To provide just one specific example, public reporting has already called into the question the entire future of the U.S. Antarctic Program, with significant scientific and geopolitical implications.⁶ We still do not know the extent of the damage done by the February 18th firings; further cuts to the workforce will be disastrous.

As a member of the Board and a respected leader in the scientific community, we implore you to stand up for the reputation and mission of the NSF. Any decisions made in the next month will severely impact the long-term success of the agency, falling squarely within the purview of National Science Board to “[identify] issues that are critical to NSF's future.”⁷ We request that you complete a review of decisions that have been made thus far, an assessment of the mission-critical functions of NSF, and strong guidance to ensure that any submission to OMB pursuant to the aforementioned executive order prioritizes the ability of the agency to deliver on its statutory obligations. We also request that you call an emergency meeting of the Board to deliver this plan to Director Panchanathan as soon as possible, ahead of the March 13th deadline. We cannot overstate the urgency of these requests.

Pursuant to Rule X of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology “shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development.”⁸ The Committee possesses

⁴ “Oversight of USAID-Funded Humanitarian Assistance Programming Impacted by Staffing Reductions and Pause on Foreign Assistance,” U.S. Agency for International Development, February 10, 2025, accessed here: <https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2025-02/USAID%20OIG%20-%20Oversight%20of%20USAID-Funded%20Humanitarian%20Assistance%20Programming%20021025.pdf>

⁵ “FY2024 Agency Financial Support,” National Science Foundation, accessed here: <https://nsf-gov-resources.nsf.gov/pubs/2025/nsf25002/pdf/nsf25002.pdf>.

⁶ Leah Feiger, “DOGE's Chaos Reaches Antarctica,” *Wired*, February 27th, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.wired.com/story/doge-antarctica-science-research-china-russia/>

⁷ “About the NSB,” National Science Foundation, accessed here: <https://www.nsf.gov/nsb/about/index.jsp>

⁸ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

jurisdiction over the National Science Foundation.⁹ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Sara Palasits or Albert Hinman with the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology



Haley Stevens
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

CC: Brian Babin
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chairman Jay Obernolte
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

⁹ *Id.*