

Opening Statement - Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-IL)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research & Science Education
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Hearing on:
The National Science Foundation's FY 2013 Budget Request
February 28, 2012

Thank you Chairman Brooks for holding this hearing and welcome back Dr. Suresh and Dr. Bowen.

In this challenging fiscal environment it is our job to make tough choices and to set priorities. I feel strongly that we need to prioritize investments that deliver real returns to taxpayers and boost our economic competitiveness. As a result I am pleased that the Administration's FY13 budget request continues to emphasize science, innovation, and STEM education generally, and the National Science Foundation in particular.

But I think it is also important for me to urge everyone to be realistic about the notion of doubling the NSF's budget, and focus instead on maintaining a sustainable, predictable path of growth. While I do think that doubling funding would yield enormous dividends for our country, I think that we should all recognize that aspirations that ignore the reality of our budget deficit are not particularly helpful to the agency or the scientific community. Predictability will help our research institutions to plan, while helping our scientists avoid the booms and busts that have driven some of our brightest minds out of the lab. In my view the President's FY13 request for the NSF strikes a good balance. I have just a few comments on specific programs and proposed activities.

First, I am very excited to see the proposed expansion of the I-Corps program. As I've told Dr. Suresh before, I strongly believe that this program embodies the NSF's original mission of both promoting the progress of science *and* advancing the national prosperity. Let's not forget that second part, especially when we are looking to maximize the efficiency of our federal investments. Although it's only about one quarter of 1 percent of NSF's budget, I think this program will yield disproportionate benefits, helping turn NSF's research investments into jobs, and encouraging both scientists and universities to push their work outside of the ivory tower to the immediate benefit of all Americans.

For my colleagues who haven't looked at this program in depth, it is important to note that we are talking about a stage of commercialization well before private sector financing gets involved.

The goal of I-Corps is to educate scientists to help them establish the viability of an idea even before forming a new small business. Last month I was able to meet with Steve Blank at Stanford to learn more about his implementation of this innovative, potentially game-changing program. I look forward to working with the NSF as this programs is expanded and improved.

Second, I am pleased that for the first time in many years we are seeing growth in the Education budget similar to that in the Research budget. We will disagree over some of the particulars in the EHR request, including the 22 percent cut to Informal STEM Education programs and flat funding for the Noyce Scholarships, but I think the overall increase is a well-earned vote of confidence in the current leadership of EHR.

There are many other interesting proposals in this budget request, including the increased focus on advanced manufacturing research that I called for in COMPETES, the Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace initiative that is another priority issue for me, and the joint effort between NSF and the Department of Education on math education. And it's good to see that the request would put all of the MREFC projects back on track after a couple of years of significant cuts.

I do have some concern about the Administration's proposal to hold NSF's operating budget flat. That seems like an odd place to start when in every other year in recent memory the agency has expressed concern about how thinly its staff has been stretched after Congress has flat-lined the ops budgets.

In closing, I have to say that the increase in your budget request makes it easier for you to dream big and for me to offer mostly positive comments. But, unfortunately, I think it's unlikely that Congress will be able to match your request when we eventually pass a budget. As I indicated at the outset, I believe that strong and sustained investments in the NSF, STEM education, and innovation generally are critical for our nation's future. My colleagues in Congress have, on a bipartisan basis, historically agreed with me, and I hope that will continue to be the case. I think this type of investment is critical to the future growth of our country.

I thank Dr. Suresh and Dr. Bowen for being here today; I look forward to your testimony and our discussion.