

**Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Hearing on American Competitiveness: The Role of Research and
Development**

February 6, 2013

**Opening Statement
By
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson**

Thank you Chairman Smith for holding this hearing, and thank you to our distinguished witnesses for taking the time to appear before the Committee this morning. I know that we will hear from all of our witnesses about the critical importance of federal research and development investments, and I look forward to your testimony.

As the competition for scarce resources has intensified, there have been some who would describe the research community as just another special interest group lobbying for their share of the pie. I could not disagree more. Yes, they have some self-interest, whether they are representing universities or high-tech companies.

But to label them as nothing more than another special interest group is, at best, misleading. Without dismissing the value of many other investments we make with our limited discretionary budget, there is probably no single investment we make, other than education, that has done more to ensure our nation's long-term economic vitality than our investment in R&D.

This holds true for the very long term investments that the federal government is uniquely suited to make in exploratory research -- where we have no idea what, if any, applications will result. But it also holds true for the financial and intellectual partnerships we build with the private sector to address more mid-term R&D challenges.

All of these investments yield immeasurable benefits to our economy and our society in terms of companies built, jobs created, and a society made healthier, safer, and more secure. They also have the secondary benefit of training the next generation of scientists and engineers who will contribute in all of these ways to their own generation, and so on.

Some specific examples of the groundbreaking innovations and companies that would not have been possible without federal R&D investments include the internet, GPS, Google, the iPhone, and barcodes. I expect we will hear more examples from the witnesses. We could probably spend our entire two-hour hearing reading off such a list.

And yet, I fear, some of my colleagues in Congress would still be unimpressed. We will still hear arguments that the federal government's role should be restricted to so-called basic research because the private sector can do the rest alone. That everybody has to take a cut. That the 8.2 percent cuts looming on March 1 may hurt a bit but are better for the country in the long run.

So let me attempt to briefly preempt those arguments. R&D is not a simple, linear process from basic to applied to development and so on to a final commercial product. It also doesn't go in only one direction. R&D is part of a complex innovation process with many feedback loops.

There is no clear line at which the public role ends and the private role begins and there has not been in any of our lifetimes. That is why partnerships between the public sector, namely our federal agencies, and the private sector, such as Mr. Templeton's company, are so important.

Second, I'd like to say a word about the consequences of sequestration. At the risk of repeating myself, we would not just be turning off the lights on many groundbreaking research facilities and experiments today, we would be eating our seed corn for tomorrow.

What talented young person would see a future in scientific research after sequestration does its damage?

Our witnesses were asked in their testimony to speculate on what kind of breakthrough technologies we might see in the next 5-20 years. I think if any of us knew the answer to that, we'd be rich. That's the point - we don't know what directions our research may take, what unknown applications and innovations will be developed.

We cannot afford to overestimate what the private sector is prepared to do on its own. And we cannot afford to underestimate the negative consequences for the nation's R&D enterprise of letting sequestration go forward.