**Ranking Member Johnson**
**Opening Statement**
**June 14, 2011**
***STEM Education in Action: Learning Today… Leading Tomorrow***

Good morning and thank you Chairman Hall for holding this hearing. I want to start by congratulating the students who are here today and welcoming you and your teachers, parents, and mentors to the Committee. I was reading about some of your winning science fair projects, and I must say that I am truly impressed by all of the outstanding work you have done. You should all be very proud.

Unfortunately, too many students across the country do not have opportunities to participate in inspiring STEM activities or to receive a high quality STEM education. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study found that less than half of our nation's students are demonstrating solid academic performance and proficiency in science. This is a startling statistic when you consider the many recent expert reports warning that our competitive edge will be lost if we do not vastly improve STEM education in this country.

No one entity can solve this problem alone. There is a role for all the key stakeholders, including federal and state governments, local school districts, higher education, informal education organizations, and industry. I'm pleased to hear today about the work Toshiba has done to support STEM education through the ExploraVision competition.

But I also want to emphasize the important and unique role of the federal government in improving STEM education. Many Federal STEM programs, including those supported by the National Science Foundation and the Department of Education, are making a difference in universities, community colleges, and K-12 schools across the nation. There are also many valuable programs being funded through other federal agencies, such as NASA, NOAA, NIST, EPA, and the Department of Energy. These agencies are filled with thousands of scientists and engineers who can make a difference in their own communities and for students across the country. As working STEM professionals, the real life work that they do using STEM is so inspiring to our children.

But the federal role is more than that. The National Science Foundation is the premier STEM education research organization in the country. For decades, NSF has been a leader in improving our collective understanding of how students learn, and how we can develop the most effective and inspiring curriculum and train the most effective and inspiring teachers. This isn't about the federal government taking over curriculum or teacher certification. It is about researchers contributing their deep expertise to making sure our teachers are well prepared and our students are really learning. I would be interested in hearing from the teachers on the panel today about their own training, and how they have implemented best practices in teaching STEM in their own classrooms.

While today's hearing is about a non-federal program, there was some discussion in the hearing charter about federal programs and spending in STEM, so I just wanted to make a couple of comments about this. I hope we are not too quick to judge based on numbers alone. OSTP, in response to the COMPETES Act, is leading an effort to inventory current programs across the government and to improve coordination and develop priorities going forward. Many of the individual agencies are also responding to recommendations from outside advisory groups and restructuring their education programs and management. While this committee should continue to be vigilant in ensuring that our limited STEM education budgets are being used as wisely as possible, as we have been for many years, I want to express my own confidence in the coordination efforts currently underway. I believe we should let them play out for the next several months before we rush to judgment about what we should or should not be spending on STEM education. Finally, I hope that the committee will have the opportunity to review the OSTP report and other agency STEM efforts in hearings with administration officials.

Today though, I look forward to hearing from these student winners about what initially sparked their interest in STEM, and what role their teachers, parents, and other mentors have played in helping them to reach their goals. This is an issue that I take very seriously. We have an education crisis in this country, and there is a very real possibility that we will lose our competitive edge and that our children will no longer have the opportunities that we had if we do not remain committed to investing in and improving STEM education. Thank you again for being here today and I look forward to an interesting discussion.