

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

A Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request for Science Agencies

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Thank you, Chairman Smith, for holding this hearing and welcome, Dr. Holdren. It's always good to have you appear before the Committee.

The fiscal year 2015 budget request makes it clear that the President remains committed to prioritizing investments in science and innovation. While limited by last year's 2-year budget agreement, the President is proposing to identify new sources for research and development funding, including through much needed tax reform. This new funding will also make a big difference for some of our top economic development and national security priorities.

I welcome discussion on the Opportunity, Growth, and Security Initiative, and I hope that my colleagues across the aisle will do the same before they outright dismiss it. For if we continue to flat fund or cut our investments in science and innovation under the guise of fiscal restraint, our nation will suffer the consequences for many decades to come.

Under flat and often uncertain budgets, we are not just ceding leadership in some areas of science and engineering, we are losing the next generation of discoverers and innovators. Early career scientists and engineers, even those in the top of their class, have increasingly come to believe that the nation is unwilling to invest in them and their talents. If nothing changes, we will continue to experience a brain drain that will have profound implications for our country's ability to innovate and compete in a global economy.

I'll make just a few specific comments about the fiscal year 2015 budget proposal under discussion today. I am pleased with the Administration's continued commitment to advanced manufacturing R&D and workforce development. I hope we can find a path forward in Congress to enact the bipartisan bill that would codify the National Network for Manufacturing Innovation.

I also support the increased funding for climate change research and mitigation. Climate change is real and its consequences are real, even if some uncertainties remain. It might be easy for the most privileged among us to sit back and say we'll be fine regardless of the severity of the impacts. But the vulnerable among us are already hurting and scientists and economists predict it will get much worse. I am saddened that we keep debating this at all.

I still hope we act before it is too late to direct our nation's great brainpower to developing solutions to reduce the warming and mitigate the impacts in our most vulnerable communities. This is also why I am pleased to see the Administration's strong budget proposal for the Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, as well as ARPA-

E, which will go a long way toward building and capturing the jobs of a growing sustainable energy sector.

At the same time, I have some questions and concerns about the budget proposal, including with respect to other parts of the DOE budget. I am also disappointed that once again we have a NASA budget request that would cut funding for the nation's human exploration program, even as the Space Launch System and Orion development projects are building hardware and getting ready for flight tests. In addition, the Administration's budget request inexplicably would cut funding for science, one of the most exciting and productive of NASA's enterprises.

I also want to learn more about the new, scaled-back proposal to overhaul Federal investments in STEM education. Now that we have the Federal STEM Education 5-year strategic plan, I hope we can have a more productive discussion about how the budget proposal is aligned with the goals of the strategic plan, and how experts in the stakeholder community are being engaged in major decisions.

The truth is we all have things to be concerned about in this budget, but the root of the problem is that there isn't enough money to go around to adequately fund all of our priorities. The President and the agencies had to make some very tough choices. Some of our own choices may be different, and Congress will have its opportunity to express those choices in our authorization and appropriations bills, but today I look forward to hearing more from Dr. Holdren about the President's choices.

As we move forward to reauthorize several of the agencies and programs within this Committee's jurisdiction, we need to give due consideration to the President's own proposals. Most importantly, I hope that any legislation that we bring to the Floor of the House reflects both the need to invest in our future and our faith in the integrity and potential of our nation's STEM talent.

Thank you, Dr. Holdren for being here today, and thank you for your continued contributions to ensuring continued U.S. leadership in science and innovation.