

FLOOR STATEMENT

Congresswoman Eddie Bernie Johnson (D-TX)
Ranking Member, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

H.R. 1806, America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015

May 20, 2015

Today I must unfortunately rise in opposition to the America Competes Act Reauthorization.

It is unfortunate because I was a strong supporter of both the original Competes Act, as well as the 2010 reauthorization. Both of those bills passed with bipartisan support. And both of those bills reflected the recommendations of the National Academy's groundbreaking 2005 report, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm."

It's worth reflecting on what that National Academy's panel found, and why they made the recommendations they did. First, the panel that wrote the report was composed of a distinguished group of individuals from industry, academia, and science, and it was headed by former Lockheed CEO Norm Augustine. The panel noted that much of America's economic growth and success in the decades following World War II was the direct result of our Nation's sustained investments in research and development.

However, they noted that a gathering storm was approaching. America's economic and military competitors around the world had begun to catch up with our Nation's technological lead. Moreover, research and development budgets in the United States were stagnating. The panel determined that America was sorely in need of a recommitment to research and development in order to maintain our competitive edge.

The Augustine panel gave specific recommendations that we increase R&D spending, revitalize STEM education across the country, and also create and support a new ARPA-E for breakthrough energy research modeled on the renowned DARPA program at the Department of Defense.

The original Competes Act implemented these recommendations across the board.

Supporting this bill was one of the highlights of my two decades of service in Congress. I have highlighted this history because it is important to understand what we are doing here today, and why these issues are so important.

Since 2010, when we passed the last Competes reauthorization, R&D spending in America has again stagnated, and by some measures even declined. In the meantime, our economic competitors have doubled down their investments in research and development. Over the past decade, China has averaged a 23% increase in R&D spending each year. Perhaps not surprisingly, in 2014 China overtook the United States to become the world's largest economic power. The crisis the Augustine committee warned about in 2005 has arrived.

What is the response of our Majority to this crisis? Nothing. That's what is in H.R. 1806. Absolutely nothing. H.R. 1806 completely abandons the recommendations of the Augustine committee and the original Competes Act.

It abandons the legacy of Competes by flat-funding R&D investments. It abandons that legacy by slashing funding for the very ARPA-E program envisioned by the Augustine Committee. It abandons that legacy by politicizing the scientific grant making process and pitting different research disciplines against one another.

I want to be clear about what it is that the Majority is abandoning. They are abandoning our future.

America is the greatest nation on earth. But our greatness is not guaranteed.

We have to do the things that are necessary to ensure a bright future for our country. That means making the same kinds of investments in science and technology that previous generations made. Our predecessors understood what was at stake. They made a commitment to invest in research and development and science education, and we still benefit from those past investments today.

But the world is not standing still. If we don't recommit to our investments in science education and research and development, we will be surpassed.

The bill before us fails to secure our Nation's future, and for that reason, I must strenuously oppose it.

I am not alone in my opposition. We have received more than 40 letters or statements of concern or outright opposition from over 60 different groups, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of American Universities, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, the Business Council for Sustainable Energy, the Coalition for National Science Funding, the STEM Education Coalition, the Truman National Security Project, and many others. And I'll put a full list of these organizations in the record at this time.

Again, I strongly oppose this bill and I reserve the balance of my time.