

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

H.R. 3293, the Scientific Research in the National Interest Act  
Full Committee Markup

October 8, 2015

Thank you Chairman Smith. Unfortunately, I am significantly less enthusiastic about the second bill we are considering today: H.R. 3293, the Scientific Research in the National Interest Act. We have been debating this bill for 2 ½ years, and we've voted on versions of this bill twice before now when it was a provision in the Majority's COMPETES legislation.

Sadly, this bill continues the Majority's efforts to impose a layer of political review on NSF's gold-standard merit-review system. Chairman Smith has been clear in his own belief that many grants that have successfully passed merit-review are not worthy of federal funding, according to his own subjective definition of "worthy."

And that determination seems to be almost entirely based on how silly the title of a research grant seems to the Chairman, who we all know, does not claim to be a scientist.

Now, I am not here to defend every NSF grant. I lack the relevant expertise to fairly evaluate the merits or value of any particular grant. So I cannot tell you with certainty that every one of the 11,000 NSF grants awarded each year is worthy by anyone's definition, and I suspect there can be room for debate on a few of those 11,000.

However, the appropriate forum for that debate is the NSF's world renowned, and much replicated merit-review process, not the halls of Congress. If we do not trust the Nation's scientific experts to make that judgment on whether a scientific grant is worthy of funding or not, then who are we to trust?

Right-wing blogs? The Heritage Action Fund? The lawyers and businessmen and other non-scientists who populate this Committee? The clear intent of this bill is to change how NSF makes funding decisions, according to what Chairman Smith thinks should be or shouldn't be funded.

I am equally concerned that another, perhaps unintended consequence of this bill will be to inhibit high-risk, high-reward research in all fields.

Given the chairman's love of astronomy in particular, he may be surprised that we've heard from astronomers already concerned that NSF, because of political pressures, is pushing scientists to justify everything according to short-term return. This will necessarily reduce the ability of our agency and our scientists to conduct truly transformative research.

The message this bill is sending to every single scientist applying for NSF funding, every single scientist sitting on a review panel, is – don't take risks.

Because anything you do that invites any attention from Congress will lead to significant and undeserved harassment, and may even endanger your career. What we are really doing with this bill is to squelch creativity, risk-taking, critical thinking, and the open exchange of ideas.

I might add that the Majority is pushing this agenda in the complete absence of any actual problem being identified with NSF's current policy that this bill is supposedly aligned with. If the existing policy is working, why move forward with this bill that the entire community views as politicizing science?

I am unaware of any scientific society, research university, or member of the National Science Board that has recommended what the Majority is proposing, and most have expressed concerns. Yet again, the Science Committee under Republican leadership is ignoring the scientific community we are supposedly here to support.

Prior to today's markup, I made an offer of a simple 25 word change to the bill which would have made this bill palatable. That offer was unfortunately rejected by the Chairman. This Committee has a legitimate oversight role, and we have a responsibility to write smart legislation that strengthens the U.S. scientific enterprise while holding the funding agencies accountable.

But this bill, and the witch hunt for NSF grants that this Committee has engaged in for the past 2 ½ years are far from legitimate exercises.

I strongly oppose the underlying bill and I urge my colleagues to do the same. I yield back.