

Statement on H.R. 3293, Scientific Research in the National Interest Act, Amendment #2
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House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
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My colleague from Texas, the Chairman of the Science Committee, has stated many times that H.R. 3293 is “consistent with the policy announced by the NSF in January 2015.” He also frequently cites a year-old comment from NSF Director Dr. Córdoba about this bill.

However, it’s one thing to use such vague statements in defense of his bill. It’s quite another thing to look directly at the NSF policy issued by Dr. Córdoba to see what it actually says.

I will quote directly from NSF’s January 2015 policy:

“The nontechnical component of the NSF award abstract must serve as a public justification for NSF funding by articulating how the project serves the national interest, as stated by NSF’s mission: to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; or to secure the national defense.”

As Dr. Holdren, the President’s Science Advisor said, “According to the clear wording and intent of the 1950 Act [that created the NSF], promoting the progress of science through basic research is in the national interest.”

Likewise, Dr. Córdoba, in describing what she means by “national interest,” points directly to the 1950 NSF mission statement. In her policy, there is no separate list defining national interest with criteria that in fact promote more applied research, not basic research.

While the words “promoting the progress of science” appear in the bill before us, they do so only as an afterthought, in dead last place and added only after many versions of this bill.

Now that we all understand NSF’s actual policy, I can briefly explain my own amendment.

By tying the term “national interest” to the 1950 mission statement, my amendment brings the bill truly in line with NSF’s own policy for transparency and accountability. My amendment also provides clarity to what we mean by the words “worthy of Federal funding,” by stating that anything that has passed the rigor of NSF’s peer-review process is “worthy of Federal funding.”

In short, my amendment fixes the underlying bill by removing restrictions that may stifle high-risk basic research, and by taking decisions about grant funding out of the hands of politicians and putting it back in the hands of scientists, where it belongs.

NSF’s 1950 mission statement, implemented through its gold-standard merit-review process, has served science and this nation so well. Let’s leave it intact by passing my amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.