

Opening Statement - Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-IL)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Research
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Hearing on:
The National Science Foundation's FY 2014 Budget Request
April 17, 2013

Thank you Chairman Bucshon for holding this hearing and welcome Dr. Marrett and Dr. Arvizu.

Let me begin by saying that I understand that America faces a serious debt threat. If we do not do anything to rein-in our long-term debt, our economic future will be imperiled. Solving this problem will require some budget cuts. But I hope that going forward we can make these cuts in a smart way that addresses the various near-term and long-term challenges that our nation faces.

In doing this, we will have to set priorities. Sometimes priority-setting means increasing investments in areas that deliver real returns for taxpayers by improving our quality of life, protecting our population from natural and man-made threats, and ensuring our economic competitiveness. Therefore, I am pleased that the Administration's FY14 budget request continues to emphasize science, innovation, and STEM education generally, and the National Science Foundation in particular.

Even though NSF has fared well in recent appropriations bills, continued uncertainty over funding levels has hurt scientific progress. The agency and universities can't plan, some of the best and brightest give up and leave their labs, and the younger generation sees what their mentors are up against and choose a different path altogether.

Our own Committee will have the opportunity to weigh in on budget and programmatic priorities across the agency as we consider an NSF reauthorization bill sometime in the next several weeks. So I appreciate this opportunity to learn more about the nature and scope of research and STEM education activities proposed in the budget.

Let me just comment on a few of the priorities described in the budget. First, you will not be surprised that I am excited to see the proposed increase for the I-Corps program. As I've said many times now, I strongly believe that this program embodies the NSF's original mission of both promoting the progress of science *and* advancing the national prosperity. Although it's only a fraction of a percent of NSF's budget, early results support my long-held belief that I-Corps will yield exponential benefits, helping turn NSF's research investments into new companies and jobs for the benefit of all Americans.

Last summer I hosted a field hearing in Chicago to learn more about this program and its early successes. For my new colleagues who haven't looked at this program in depth, it is important to note that this program educates scientists on how to develop viable commercial products from their research and connects them with like-minded venture capitalists and entrepreneurs. The final decisions on whether or not to commercialize

research still rest with the scientists in question and, of course, with the private sector which would fund the ideas. Already we are seeing results with I-Corps graduates such as Neon receiving venture capital funding for a product developed through the program. This public-private partnership is in the best tradition of US science policy and I look forward to working with the NSF as this program develops.

Second, I am pleased with the continued emphasis on advanced manufacturing at NSF and several other agencies. We must regrow our American manufacturing base, and we will not do it with the technologies and processes of yesterday. But the small and medium-sized industries that comprise a significant portion of our manufacturing capacity can't do it all on their own, and they certainly don't have the resources or capacity to invest in the most far-reaching R&D. NSF plays a critical role in funding basic research with potential application to the advanced manufacturing technologies and processes of the future.

There are many other interesting proposals in this budget request, including the increased focus on big data, the expansion of the INSPIRE program to support interdisciplinary research, and NSF's plans to begin to implement the OSTP policy memorandum on public access to the results of federally funded research. It's also good to see that all of the current MREFC projects are on track and NSF is moving ahead with the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope.

I will wrap up with a few comments and questions about the Agency's proposals for consolidating many of its STEM education programs, both within the Agency and as part of the Administration's federal-wide STEM reorganization. Mostly, I'd like to hear more details about all of these proposals, because some of them seem to be still just rough sketches. For example, with respect to the consolidated National Graduate Research Fellowship Program, I have no doubt that NSF's own graduate research fellowships will continue without disruption, but I wonder how NSF will work with the mission agencies to ensure that their mission-specific needs are being met through this new consolidated national program administered by NSF. I'd also like to understand better what's being proposed for graduate traineeships, and what's new about the consolidated undergraduate program, or if it's mostly a repackaging of existing programs. I suspect many of my colleagues will have STEM questions for you today.

I thank Dr. Marrett and Dr. Arvizu for being here today; I look forward to your testimony and our discussion.