

Science committee hearings delve into NSF priorities

March 9 and 21, 2017

The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, Subcommittee on Research and Technology held two oversight hearings on funding priorities for the National Science Foundation (NSF).

On March 9, NSF Director France Córdova and NSF Inspector General Allison Lerner discussed the agency's goals, challenges, and overall economic impact. In her testimony, Ms. Lerner provided recommendations to increase accountability, addressing problems such as research fraud and the incurred cost of contract employees. Dr. Córdova indicated that the rising frequency of research misconduct identified by the agency, such as plagiarism and data falsification, is likely due to improved detection, rather than increased occurrence.

Dr. Córdova also highlighted the NSF INCLUDES (Inclusion across the Nation of Communities of Underrepresented Discoverers in Engineering and Science) program and its commitment to building diversity in all areas of science and engineering as well as promoting innovation. Congressman Lamar Smith (R-TX-21) said that the NSF needs more guidance to rebalance priorities, improve oversight, and ensure accountability and transparency.

During the second hearing on March 21, four expert witnesses testified on the future of the NSF. The hearing also examined some of the agency's challenges, such as setting priorities to meet societal needs, opportunities for data sharing, and developing a new generation of STEM workers. Some members of the committee expressed concerns that cuts to geoscience funding could hurt national security and public health. Dr. Maria T. Zuber, Chair of the National Science Board, explained that the United States is in an increasingly competitive global landscape, facing challenges that only the insights of science and technology can address. Dr. Zuber discussed how fundamental research into the geosciences supported by the NSF has provided the scientific framework for hydraulic fracturing, led to better storm and hazard prediction, and increased our understanding of large climatic trends. According to Dr. Jeffrey Spies, Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer at the Center for Open Science and Assistant Professor at the University of Virginia, the results of NSF-funded initiatives are readily observed in our everyday lives, and the return on investment is immense.

Source: House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
