

**Chairman Roy Blunt Opening Statement
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies**

Hearing: “STEM Education: Preparing Students for the Careers of Today and the Future”

March 15, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee today. Providing students with high-quality education in STEM – science, technology, engineering, and math – is critical for the economic competitiveness and security of our nation. It will support future National Institutes of Health-funded scientists seeking cures for deadly diseases, computer science engineers preventing cyberattacks on our businesses and national infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing technicians building everything from medical devices to airplanes.

STEM education, from preschool through college, provides the basic skills and competencies all students need, and prepares them for well-paying careers across education levels. The median annual wage for STEM workers is more than double the median wage for all workers. This holds true across education levels, including the 25% of STEM workers with less than a bachelor’s degree. For example, workers with associate level STEM degrees earn, on average, 66% more annually than their peers with the same education level. The number of STEM-related jobs is also expected to grow faster than the overall job market in the future. And, expected high rates of retirement in some STEM fields, particularly manufacturing, will mean even more opportunities for younger workers.

This hearing will explore how programs and activities funded through the Labor/HHS appropriations bill impact STEM education. These programs range from in-school and after-school k-12 programs, to NIH career fellowships to training dislocated workers. In addition, other Federal policies, while not specifically involving STEM, directly impact students seeking careers in those fields. For example, reinstating year-round Pell grants, as this Subcommittee proposed last year, will be critical for students pursuing STEM degrees and careers, particularly those at community colleges.

As we continue to focus on training our 21st Century workforce, there are many ongoing challenges that Federal STEM education efforts must address. We need to better prepare and train teachers. We need to promote more diversity in STEM. And we need to ensure opportunities are available to students in rural, urban, and suburban areas alike. But we also need to make sure Federal STEM education efforts are well coordinated and avoid duplication.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today. They have unique perspectives and experiences, working with different levels of our education and training systems, which I hope Members find beneficial as we continue to address our nation’s STEM priorities.

Thank you.

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