

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

Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the National Institutes of Health

April 11, 2019

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you, Dr. Collins and the Institute Directors, for appearing before the Subcommittee today to discuss the National Institutes of Health's FY2020 budget request.

As Chairman of this Subcommittee, re-prioritizing funding for the National Institutes of Health after a decade of stagnation has been my number one priority.

Over the past four years, we have increased funding by \$9 billion or 30 percent.

This increase has funded significant progress on vaccines for Ebola and Zika, developed blood tests to detect different types of cancer, and led to the first-ever drug specifically for postpartum depression. In my home state of Missouri, NIH research has demonstrated that interactive therapy can reduce rates of childhood depression, discovered an enzyme responsible for the spread of cancer, and supported research aimed at improving cancer immunotherapy.

I am disappointed the FY2020 budget request cut the agency by \$4.9 billion or 13 percent. This is not a choice I will make when we write the FY2020 Labor/HHS appropriations bill.

While my commitment to biomedical research remains strong, I am deeply concerned about an issue I think NIH and the entire research community needs to take more seriously. Foreign governments are initiating systematic programs to influence the American research enterprise.

There is a Chinese government program to recruit NIH-funded researchers to steal intellectual property, cheat the peer-review system, establish shadow laboratories in China, and help the Chinese government obtain confidential information about NIH research grants.

I understand and support the need to balance protecting against foreign threats with the collaboration and open access that has long been prioritized in the medical research community.

And in almost every case, talented foreign researchers have benefited the U.S. research community and moved medical research forward. As I have said many times, I believe that any foreign student coming to the United States for advanced education should be able to stay in the U.S. after that training is complete.

However, we must recognize that not everyone is well intentioned. We know from an ongoing FBI investigation that the Chinese government is trying to undermine the U.S. research infrastructure. This is a serious threat to NIH peer-review system, to universities and research institutions' intellectual property, and to corrupting a system that has long been held as the gold standard in research worldwide.

The NIH Advisory Committee has recommended several steps, including implementing a broad education campaign about the requirement to disclose foreign sources of funding and developing enhanced cybersecurity protocols. While I appreciate the Advisory Committee's recommendations, I do not think NIH

has made the research community fully aware of the exact threats they face, and more importantly, how to combat them. In fact, NIH has only sent one letter to the community on the subject. The research community needs to understand that this is a serious, immediate, and specific threat, and that some foreign governments will use any means necessary to obtain a competitive advantage over the U.S.

In this vulnerable environment, I think it is prudent for NIH to be even more cautious about ensuring systems and protocols are in place to protect the research community. But I am unconvinced that is happening now.

Moving forward, I want to see clear steps taken to ensure all NIH grantees are trained to understand their roles and responsibilities within current policy. NIH needs to evaluate their peer-review system and internal controls through a lens that takes into account national security threats. And, finally, those who inappropriately share information from the peer-review process or illegally share intellectual property need to be held accountable.

While the number of individuals that are part of China's Thousand Talents program may be few, this program has uncovered a systematic flaw. We must take this threat seriously and NIH should take definitive steps today to maintain the integrity of the NIH system.

Thank you.

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