

MEMORANDUM

TO: U.S. Senate Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, Minority
FROM: U.S. Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, Minority
DATE: July 6, 2023
RE: Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

INTRODUCTION

As the Senate Appropriations Committee (Appropriations Committee) prepares the fiscal year 2024 funding bills, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation minority (Committee) would like to provide its views and recommendations regarding a few of the inclusions in President Biden’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 budget request. Not all agencies within the Committee’s jurisdiction are reflected in this memorandum.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

The mission of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is to provide daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, climate monitoring to fisheries management, and coastal restoration, and to support marine commerce.¹ To this end, the Committee encourages budgetary resources at NOAA to be focused on protecting human lives and property and supporting the U.S. economy. The Committee opposes any funding for NOAA that will not be used to further its core mission, especially in regard to adding requirements for research funding and fellowship programs to “advance equity,” address “climate change and environmental justice,” and other criteria not mentioned in statute. For example, most of the chosen nominees for NOAA’s Coastal Management 2023-2025 Fellowship list “equity” or “environmental justice” in their project goals.²

The request for an additional \$78.2 million to implement Executive Order (E.O.) 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad to “help NOAA build a climate-ready nation” should not be included in the appropriations bill.³ We also urge the Appropriations Committee to reject a NOAA request for \$9.106 million to support equity and workforce initiatives. One example given for the use of this increase in funding is for “education, outreach, and training to support the seafood industry with a focus on environmental justice and equity.” NOAA’s request for an increase of \$1.2 million and two full time equivalent (FTE) positions to expand the Community Social Vulnerability Toolbox to “address climate change concerns (Section 219 of E.O. 14008), environmental justice (E.O. 12898), and racial equity (E.O. 13985) in underserved coastal communities” should be rejected.

¹ <https://www.commerce.gov/bureaus-and-offices/noaa>

² https://coast.noaa.gov/fellowship/23_fellows.html

³ <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-fy-2024-budget-building-climate-ready-nation>

Instead, a better use of taxpayer dollars would be for the recapitalization of NOAA aircraft assets; this was not included in NOAA’s budget request. Hurricane hunters provide an essential service across the nation, improving hurricane and atmospheric river forecast accuracy and saving lives. Without additional aircraft, NOAA is not able to fully meet the mission requirements of providing real time hurricane and storm monitoring. Therefore, appropriated funds to NOAA should be focused on ensuring it can fulfill its core mission without diverting resources to ancillary progressive causes.

National Institute of Standards and Technology

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) was established to improve U.S. industrial competitiveness.⁴ The Committee does not support the requested increase of \$5.489 million to support eight new positions for Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability under the Scientific and Technical Research and Services (STRS) Program.

From its global warming initiatives to social policy projects, it is clear NIST has increasingly suffered from mission creep. For example, NIST requested a 16% increase (\$2.2 million) over FY23 enacted levels for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) projects, which the Committee does not support. The Strategic Plan for FY 2022-FY 2024 released from NIST’s DEI office mentions its “professional development” opportunities including training sessions such as “What’s Your Micro Trigger?”⁵ The Committee takes issue with using Laboratory Program funds meant to promote innovation to instead entrench DEI across departments and agencies. To that end, the Committee does not support the creation of three positions whose responsibilities include reviewing “policies, processes, programs, and practices to foster a more inclusive work environment and experience for NIST staff.”

Finally, the CHIPS Program office, which is housed within NIST, released a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) earlier this year detailing the grant criteria for the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 (CHIPS Act). The NOFO unfairly discourages non-union labor and attempts to increase the use of mass transit and expand employer-provided child care. Regardless of the merits of these ideas, none of these *de novo* requirements were included in the CHIPS Act and are irrelevant to the legislation’s intent, which was to secure U.S. national security interests by boosting domestic semiconductor manufacturing. If Congress wanted to mandate businesses provide “free” child care to employees, it would have required such by law. On March 22, 2023, the Committee’s Ranking Member Ted Cruz (R-TX) led a letter with more than a dozen Senate Republicans urging the administration to strike these liberal social policy conditions that were attached to the grants. Accordingly, the Committee believes that any funds appropriated for the coming fiscal year to NIST should be limited to NIST’s statutory mission and not make the agency into an arbiter of progressive social policies.

NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION

Overall, the Committee encourages an appropriation bill that prioritizes full funding of deep space exploration and aeronautics at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

⁴ <https://www.commerce.gov/bureaus-and-offices/nist>

⁵ <https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2022/10/31/nist-deia-strategic-plan-final-2022.pdf>

(NASA), and which omits DEI activities, such as the \$22 million request for the Office of Diversity & Equal Opportunity. Furthermore, the Committee encourages a change in NASA’s telework policy. Although NASA relies on its individual organizations and programs to set telework expectations, a better workforce policy would be to require more in-office work than the bare minimum set by Office of Personnel Management guidance, which still only requires staff to be present in the office for two days per pay period, equating to one day per week.⁶

The Committee is also concerned by where funding increases are targeted. For example, the Committee is skeptical of the requested \$278 million increase — which accounts for nearly 60% of the total requested increase in the Science budget — for Earth Science given the stated emphasis on climate change research. The president’s budget also requested \$570 million in taxpayer money to reduce aviation’s climate impact. This request covers a Sustainable Flight National Partnership, which the administration claims will reduce fuel burn by as much as 30 percent. If reducing fuel consumption is necessary and critical for getting astronauts to space, then by all means NASA should pursue such a goal. However, if the goal is to make imperceptible changes in CO2 emissions as part of the administration’s zealous effort to micromanage global temperatures, then NASA should abandon such wasted mental energy. NASA should not become a plaything for anti-fossil fuel environmentalists. The Committee would like to see funding for these missions targeted at worthy scientific enterprise and not the advancement of political agendas.

The Committee would also like to see appropriations devoid of mission creep. This budget request bizarrely included an additional \$2 million supporting climate smart agriculture in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and others in the agriculture sector. NASA should be focused on exploration and space technology efforts rather than working with USAID to improve environmental management and climate change resilience in developing countries. The Committee is naturally skeptical that NASA is sufficiently focused on its day job when it has been expending resources to distribute pride flag pins with the official NASA insignia.



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

As with many of the other administration requests, the Committee opposes the National Science Foundation (NSF) budget request’s overemphasis on climate change, clean energy-related activities, and DEI-related initiatives. Under the “Build a Resilient Planet” theme, NSF requests a whopping \$1.6 billion for FY2024, which is \$630 million more (a 65% increase) than FY2023. Programmatic examples under this theme that the Committee does not support include \$30 million for the further development of the National Discovery Cloud (NDC) for Climate as well as a \$25 million investment in the OISE Global Centers (GC) program targeted at enabling research on climate change and clean energy on an international scale. Federal taxpayers already support significant basic research on climate; additional expenditure of tax money is largely political theater masquerading as science.

⁶ https://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/npg_img/N_PR_3600_002B/_N_PR_3600_002B_.pdf

Further, NSF requests more than \$550 million for Clean Energy Technology (CET), a 16.7% increase from the FY23 enacted amount of \$484.42M that included CHIPS supplemental funding. NSF also requests \$15 million to start a new initiative called Climate Equity Fellowships, which it says “will train students in climate science, disparities in climate impacts on different communities, engagement with such communities, and climate-related policies, to enable them to lead and advance climate equity.”⁷ Other ancillary requests that the Committee does not support include research in affordable green housing and sustainable systems for clean water, clean transit, and other infrastructure—all of which has virtually nothing to do with NSF’s statutory responsibilities.

NSF prioritizing narrowly-focused DEI efforts over merit does not actually respond to the workforce challenges NSF has requested funds to correct. NSF has requested \$50.5 million for the Eddie Bernice Johnson INCLUDES Initiative (NSF INCLUDES) to “catalyze the STEM enterprise to work collaboratively for inclusive change, resulting in a STEM workforce that reflects the population of the Nation” and \$4.04 million for an Analytics for Equity Initiative to “increase the impact of equity-focused evidence-based strategies.” NSF is working to solve big problems. To that end, NSF should be focused on hiring and developing the best talent, not focused on social engineering.

CONCLUSION

For the above reasons, Ranking Member Cruz asks the U.S. Senate Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to reject the aforementioned administration requests when crafting the FY 2024 appropriations bill.

⁷ https://nsf-gov-resources.nsf.gov/2023-03/01_fy2024.pdf?VersionId=.GY1.yQBWN.zWWNGfLifyUA7VW.PxMuy