DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Testimony before

The Senate Committee on Finance

Hearing titled

Foreign Threats to Taxpayer Funded Research: Oversight Opportunities and Policy Solutions

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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Wyden, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for your long-standing support of the biomedical research enterprise and of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) specifically. It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss how NIH works to protect the integrity of the U.S. biomedical enterprise and neutralize foreign threats to the integrity of taxpayer-funded research.

The United States is the world leader in biomedical research. As the largest public funder of that research, NIH sets the standard for innovation and scientific discovery that aims to advance the health of all Americans. We exemplify and promote the highest levels of scientific integrity, public accountability, and social responsibility in the conduct of science. We promote open collaboration by leveraging formal and informal collaborations with scientists at research institutions around the world, which is imperative to solving the most pressing and perplexing health challenges that are facing the American public. This exchange of knowledge is an essential part of innovation, and it is critical to our global competitiveness. Foreign-born scientists contribute to improving health, fostering innovation, and advancing science.

Many recent scientific advances, such as sequencing the human genome, or the development of the gene-editing tool kit known as CRISPR, was predicated upon international collaborations. Since 2000, 39 percent of U.S. Nobel prizes in physics, chemistry, and medicine have been awarded to foreign-born scientists.[1] Foreign-born scientists, trainees, and employees at American universities are hard at work assisting in the advancement of knowledge. U.S. scientists routinely collaborate productively with investigators in foreign countries, resulting in many scientific successes.

[1] https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/DAY-OF-RELEASE.Nobel-Prize.October-20171.pdf

Partnerships with numerous foreign entities are also essential for predicting, and rapidly identifying and responding to threats from emerging infectious diseases and pathogens. For example, a joint working group made up of NIH and National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) representatives developed a strategic research program that identifies, reviews, and jointly funds bilateral projects that address high priority infect

NIH has taken, and continues to take, a proactive approach to identifying, resolving, and preventing issues of concern.

NIH identifies and monitors concerns through several channels. We regularly partner with colleagues at

We are developing resources to help awardee institutions understand our expectations regarding research investigators who, in addition to NIH funding, receive additional research funding from domestic or foreign sources.

As I mentioned, the U.S. biomedical research community at large has a vested interest in mitigating these unacceptable breaches of trust and confidentiality. Community engagement is such an important part of our activities. Last year, we convened a working group of the Advisory Committee to the NIH Director (ACD) to develop recommendations related to foreign influences on research integrity.[5] We

international S&T cooperation, while simultaneously identifying and minimizing improper influence on the integrity of the American R&D enterprise.

While we have taken bold and concrete steps to bolster research integrity and neutralize foreign threats against U.S. biomedical research, we remain conscious of how these actions could affect the morale of honest and dedicated foreign researchers. In March 2019, we responded to a joint letter[6] from three Chinese American biomedical professional societies, in which they expressed concerns that policies designed to protect biomedical proprietary information may be singling out Chinese students and scholars working in the United States. In our response, published in the journal Science[7], we acknowledge these concerns, and that the vast majority of Chinese scientists working in America are committed to the cause of expanding knowledge for the betterment of humankind, and to do so in a fair and honest way. Importantly, NIH reviews have identified concerns involving individuals who are not of Chinese ethnicity

The individuals violating laws and policies represent a small proportion of scientists working in and with U.S. institutions. We must ensure that our responses to this issue do not create a hostile environment for colleagues who are deeply dedicated to advancing human health through scientific inquiry. We cannot afford to reject brilliant minds working honestly and collaboratively to provide hope and healing to millions around the world.

In closing, as Principal Deputy Director of NIH, I can assure the Committee that the senior leadership at NIH will continue to diligently protect the integrity of U.S. taxpayer funded research.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[6] https://science.sciencemag.org/content/363/6433/1290
[7] https://science.sciencemag.org/content/363/6433/1292.full