

CHAMBER HILL

INSIGHTS

House Science, Space,
and Technology Oversight
Subcommittee Hearing on
Balancing Biotechnology
Innovation and Biosecurity

House Science, Space, and Technology Oversight Subcommittee Hrg on Balancing Biotechnology Innovation and Biosecurity

On September 16, the House Science, Space, and Technology Oversight Subcommittee [held](#) a hearing to discuss how to balance biotechnology innovation and biosecurity. Members expressed concern about the administration's [gain-of-function policy](#), which was recently implemented in line with a 2025 [Executive Order](#) on the subject. There was bipartisan agreement that current policy is not striking the right balance between protecting U.S. research and enabling it to grow. Questions were also asked about the policy's effects on broader issues within the biotech industry including on the domestic research environment the scientific workforce, and competition with China.

OPENING STATEMENTS

- [Full Committee Chairman Brian Babin \(R-TX-36\)](#)
- [Full Committee Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren \(D-CA-18\)](#)
- [Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Rich McCormick \(R-GA-7\)](#)
- [Oversight Subcommittee Ranking Member Emilia Sykes \(D-OH-13\)](#)

WITNESS TESTIMONY

- Dr. Anemone Franz, Visiting Research Fellow, American Enterprise Institute - [Testimony](#)
- Mr. Joshua Hodges, Visiting Fellow, Hoover Institution - [Testimony](#)
- Dr. Gigi Gronvall, Professor, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins - [Testimony](#)

MEMBER DISCUSSION

Regulatory Uncertainty

Members from both parties had clarifying questions about the overall impacts of the gain-of-function policy and what the administration and Congress can do to reduce uncertainty. Full Committee Chair Brian Babin (R-TX-36) and Rep. Daniel Webster (R-FL-11) asked who oversees the current safety standards for gain-of-function research and what needs to be done to ensure the research is not misused. Mr. Hodges

described this as one of his main areas of concern, as oversight is currently spread out across 15 agencies with no singular leader. In terms of improving oversight, he stated there needs to be better intelligence-gathering methods, and there should be someone accountable to Congress and the Executive. Chairman Babin also asked Dr. Franz how Congress should distinguish legitimate beneficial research from dangerous ones. She explained the focus should be on research with potential to cause outsized harm to society based on a risk-benefit analysis framework.

Oversight Subcommittee Ranking Member Emilia Sykes (D-OH-13) and Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR-1) asked Dr. Gronvall about the direct impacts of the gain-of-function policy and how the administration can better engage with the research community. Dr. Gronvall explained that the policy lacks any exception process for research with clear public health importance, researchers are self-censoring proposals out of concern for scrutiny, and there is no list of what is in- and out-of-scope. She further explained that the administration needs to talk to the researchers who are part of the regulated community to understand what they actually need.

Workforce

Democratic members were interested in understanding how this new policy, and additional policies implemented by the administration, had impacted the scientific workforce. Ranking Member Sykes asked Dr. Gronvall about the policy's effects on the broader scientific workforce. Dr. Gronvall explained that there has been a lot of self-censorship as researchers try to navigate the changing policies and aim to avoid negative attention on their institution and work. She also stated that early career researchers have been hit the hardest as they are most dependent on consistent funding and most exposed to grant cancellations. Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL-11) focused on the contributions from international STEM scientists and the impact of changing immigration policies on that population. Dr. Gronvall confirmed that universities have not been able to accept as many students due to visa concerns, further harming the early career workforce, and emphasized the long-time importance international researchers have had in the U.S.

Competition

There was bipartisan discussion about maintaining U.S. leadership in biotech production and preventing important research from moving overseas, specifically to China. Full Committee Ranking Member Lofgren (D-CA-18) asked about the near-term consequences of the competitive shift in biotech innovation. Dr. Gronvall shared that U.S. researchers are already unable to be fully present in the international scientific community because of other policies and China is filling those gaps. Mr. Hodges explained that China is rapidly catching up to us, thanks to the U.S. funding Chinese development, and this is not a new phenomenon to blame on the current administration. He further stated that the country leading in biotech gets to set global standards, which is vital for the U.S. to maintain. Reps. Foster and April McClain

Dr. Gronvall and Mr. Hodges agreed this is a serious concern, which they have been watching for a long time, as it is cheaper and faster to get drugs developed in China. Mr. Hodges explained the risk mirrors what happened with rare earth minerals in that China could restrict American access to drugs and everyday products. All three witnesses agreed it is necessary to have a coordinated national strategy to match China's whole-of-government approach.

Rep. Nicholas Begich (R-AK-At-Large) asked Mr. Hodges what Congress could do to move production back to American soil. He noted that China surpassed the U.S. in total clinical trials in 2020 and said the remaining advantage lies in lab innovation rather than manufacturing. Mr. Hodges urged Congress to include biotechnology in outbound investment legislation to invest more time and resources in the field.

We trust you found this summary useful. Please reach out to [us](#) with any questions.

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