

Prepared Statement of Ranking Member Richard Burr

Protecting U.S. Biomedical Research: Efforts to Prevent Undue Foreign Influence

April 22, 2021

Thank you Chair Murray for holding this hearing today. This is a topic that I know well because of where I spend the other half of my time, the Senate Intelligence Committee.

From where I sit now, and how I spend my time, I want to impress upon my colleagues here today – this threat is real, it is credible, and it is dangerous to our way of life in America.

We cannot be complacent.

This hearing is about the efforts of foreign actors to influence the biomedical research enterprise.

The Government of the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party are the most sophisticated perpetrators, but other foreign actors are also engaged in efforts to subvert our biomedical research.

Our adversaries are engaging in a systematic effort to infiltrate the academic research community and siphon away the results of United States spending on biomedical research.

Last week in the Intelligence Committee’s annual World Wide Threats Hearing, Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, said China’s government is an “unparalleled priority” in our intelligence community.

The 2021 Annual Threat Assessment Report reads, “China will remain the top threat to US technological competitiveness as the Chinese Communist Party targets key technology sectors[and] research institutions.”

Our enemies are targeting vulnerabilities in our biomedical research enterprise because it is an easy target.

They not going to take us on in a straight up fight, because they know that they will lose. So instead, they exploit the openness of our society and the collaborative culture that the academic research community encourages.

This means that our advancements in biomedical research are at grave risk.

It means that the billions of taxpayer dollars that are invested each year toward discoveries are leveraged or outright stolen by our adversaries.

And, it means that our enemies can capitalize on the billions of dollars that American taxpayers invest every year to beat us to the punch on the next game-changing technology to save lives or to cause unimaginable harm.

Because they know it’s easier to get to home base when you steal your way to third.

We are here today to focus specifically on this threat in the context of protecting biomedical research.

This year, Congress appropriated 43 billion dollars to the NIH for biomedical research. And we know that over time, for every one dollar spent on basic research at the NIH, the private sector spends about eight dollars.

That's a lot of money, and the United States has historically been the undisputed leader in biomedical innovation, so it's easy to see why the government of China is trying to steal our secrets and eliminate our competitive advantage.

Global collaboration has been, and will always be, the key to our success in maintaining global leadership in our advancements.

As I have said before, all smart people don't exist just here in the United States.

Innovation is a global race, and competition is good for innovation.

So, we must think about how to foster greater innovation at home, mitigate potential risks associated with foreign influence, and maintain our edge.

Because deception and theft are not a valid competitive tool, and we need to be aware that this is happening more than we'd like to admit.

I made this case for five-eyes partners, the intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States to

tackle the issue of 5G for our cellular technology, and I think it also makes sense when we discuss our funding and advancements in biomedical research.

The NIH partners with academic centers all over the country to support foundational research that leads to discoveries that improve the quality of life for all Americans, and that research benefits the rest of the world with innovative drugs, devices, and treatments.

North Carolina benefits each year from over \$1 billion in NIH-funded research.

Along with their accomplishments and discoveries, our research institutions have seen firsthand what our enemies will do to steal our most valuable secrets and assets in research.

There is a concerted effort by individuals from China, backed by their government, to be educated in America and to work for 10 years here, with the full intent to bring back to China's government everything they can learn, store, or steal.

The government of China has also worked to recruit Chinese expatriates and researchers of other nationalities who may be attracted by the benefits that the Chinese government is able to offer to them.

I have cautioned the research institutions in my state to prepare for a reality with different revenue streams, and encouraged them to rely less on researchers from the countries whose governments seek to do us harm.

We must balance the rewards of this research with the risks to our country.

HHS and other Federal agencies recognize the urgency of this issue, and the threat it poses to our country.

The NIH has come a long way from the announcement that Dr. Collins made to this committee in August of 2018, and I am glad that he took the initiative to form a working group to solve for NIH's blind spots in the undue influence of foreign actors and adversaries.

This is a challenge that will affect all corners of HHS.

Our systems that house Medicare data must be secure, just as our programs to protect priceless COVID-19 vaccine development data must be fortified.

This threat reaches into many facets of our country.

The private sector is also experiencing this threat, and our solutions to these issues will require their input, participation, and partnership.

There is no easy path, but if we concede the innovation race, our global competitiveness and our national security will be at risk.

Thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to inform our committee on your efforts to keep America at the forefront of discovery and innovation, and protect our world-renowned research institutions.