Chair Susan M. Collins
Opening Statement
Senate Appropriations Committee
"Biomedical Research: Keeping America's Edge in Innovation"
April 30, 2025

As this is the first full committee hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee in the 119th Congress, I would like to first take a moment to welcome back our returning members and to also welcome the new members of the committee. I'm very pleased to be joined once again at the helm of this committee by the senior Senator from Washington, Vice Chair Murray.

The topic for our first full committee hearing, "Biomedical Research: Keeping America's Edge in Innovation," is significant. It speaks to the high priority that this committee places on biomedical research. There is no investment that pays greater dividends to American families than our investment in this research, which can lead to life-saving and life-enhancing discoveries.

For more than 75 years, the United States has been the world leader in scientific research and technological innovation. We earned this position through the hard work of countless researchers and scientists and their staff, many of whom trusted their careers to the culture of science built by the American people. At the heart of that culture is a strategy coordinating grant-based research at university and private labs funded through the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and many other federal agencies.

This strategy has been an enormous success. In the years following World War II, the U.S. emerged as the global leader in science and technology, accounting for 69 percent of global R&D across all fields by the year 1960. In biomedical research, the U.S. dominated the second half of the 20th century. During this period, our scientists based in the United States published 70 percent of the papers in the top cited journals, secured the majority of the world's biomedical patents, and won more than half of the Nobel prizes awarded in medicine.

Stability is a key aspect of the American formula because it allows scientists to focus their work knowing that they will have the support they need to pursue and test their ideas from start to finish. The freedom to explore and collaborate is also crucial, especially to younger scientists who are eager to get into the lab and work on what inspires them.

This combination has made the United States an "irresistible magnet for researchers everywhere" – as Dr. Haller, one of our witnesses, put it so well – drawing the best and the brightest from around the world. Their work demonstrates the value of the American system leading to breakthroughs that save lives and restore health for so many.

For example, over the past 20 years, the FDA has approved more than 600 new cancer treatments, including standard chemotherapy, targeted therapies, and immunotherapies – all made possible by decades of the National Cancer Institute investment into basic research.

Another example relates to Alzheimer's and dementia research. Because of studies financed by the National Institute on Aging, researchers now have an array of biomarker tests for dementia, including a new blood test allowing for earlier diagnosis of this devastating disease.

But the continued success of this system and America's leadership cannot be taken for granted. Since the turn of the century, China's investment in biomedical research has grown more than 50-fold. China has now caught up with the U.S. and biomedical patents filed and papers published.

Proposed funding cuts, the firing of essential federal scientists, and policy uncertainties threaten to undermine the foundation for our nation's global leadership.

One such recent development has been the unilateral imposition of an arbitrary 15 percent indirect cost cap on NIH grants in February, followed by more recent caps on grants from DOE and other federal agencies. While some reform of the Facilities and Administrative system may be merited, this “one size fits all” cap will be extremely harmful to many institutions and the people who benefit from their work. They also are directly contrary to language approved by this Committee, year, after year, after year, and incorporated into appropriations law.

Also very troubling are the Administration's abrupt cancelation of grants, proposals to slash federal funding, and laying off scientists and technical experts with apparently little or no justification. These actions put our leadership in biomedical innovation at real risk and must be reversed.

America's edge in biomedical innovation is also of immense economic value to the nation, generating, for example, two and a half dollars for each dollar invested through NIH, supporting 400,000 jobs, and driving global health standards. In Maine, NIH grants and contracts support 1,468 jobs and $286 million in economic activity.

But we must not lose sight at what is truly at stake here. This debate is not just about scientists, and researchers, and economic activity. If clinical trials are halted, research is stopped, and laboratories are closed, effective treatments and cures for diseases like Alzheimer's, Type I diabetes, childhood cancers, and Duchenne's Muscular Dystrophy, will be delayed or not discovered at all.

We must preserve and strengthen America's leadership for the sake of families all across this country.