

(September 21, 2006) Statement on Nanotechnology

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

HON. DANIEL LIPINSKI (D-IL)

Member, U.S. House Committee on Science

Hearing: "Research on Environmental and Safety Impacts of Nanotechnology: What are the Federal Agencies doing?"

September 21, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman; I am pleased to be here today for this hearing on nanotechnology. Nanotechnology is one of the most promising technologies of our time and could revolutionize industries ranging from transportation to medicine, as well as have a huge impact on improving our national security.

Many universities and businesses are becoming invested in nanotechnology efforts in my home state of Illinois, which is one of the strongest states in nanotechnology research according to the Small Times Magazine. For example, Northwestern University, my alma mater, houses the Institute for Nanotechnology, which supports efforts in nanotechnology and facilitates collaboration in solving major problems in the field of nanotechnology. It includes the Center for Nanofabrication and Molecular Self-Assembly, a multi-million dollar research facility and one of the first federally funded centers of its kind. The Institute helps foster partnership to encourage researchers and entrepreneurs to become involved in this cutting edge technology, creating jobs and the potential for entirely new industries. In these times of increasing economic competitiveness, this new technology is extremely critical.

I would also like to recognize Jack Lavin, Director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, for the work that he and the DCEO have done to make nanotechnology a strong presence in Illinois. They have worked to attract federal and private funds to the state to encourage the expansion of nanotechnology research and development and fully realize the vast economic benefits that our state will receive from current investment.

Yet there are numerous challenges still facing the development of nanotechnology, particularly regarding environmental and health safety. There is simply so much that we do not know about the ways that nanoparticles behave and how they interact with each other and other particles. The properties and behaviors can change dramatically when substances are reduced to such a small size. We need to at least better understand these changes. And this need is even more pressing considering that nanotechnology is already on the market in many products, from sunscreen to stain resistant pants.

The federal government must promote research and education about the impacts of these emerging technologies, both to ensure that negative effects are minimized and to facilitate public acceptance of nanotechnology. Development of nanotechnology is surging ahead, with America as a leader in the international community, and I am pleased to see that. But we must make sure that proper health and environmental safeguards are in place, and government regulation may be necessary to ensure this safety.

On this note, I am disappointed with just released the prioritized environmental, health, and safety research plan from the National Nanotechnology Initiative, 6 months late and lacking a clearly prioritized set of research objectives with specific agency responsibilities and costs. I look forward to receiving more information from the Administration on the "next steps" listed in this plan.

There is so much potential for our economy with nanotechnology that we must find a safe and comprehensive way to resolve these issues. Our economic future may depend on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.