Statement from the Hon. Brian Baird for the Record

Full Committee Hearing
Science, Technology and Global Economic Competitiveness
October 20, 2005

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you and Ranking Member Gordon for raising importance to the issue of math and science education as it relates to scientific and technological competitiveness. I would also like to thank the witnesses - Mr. Augustine, Dr. Vagelos, and Dr. Wulf - for testifying today on the recently released National Academy of Sciences report entitled, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*. One of the recommendations made in this report is to vastly improve K-12 math and science education. I could not agree more. This should be one of the highest priorities of the Federal and state governments and I look forward to reviewing the testimony of our witnesses and the specific recommendations from this report to translate these recommendations into Congressional action.

With the topic of today's discussion centering around science competitiveness, it could not be more appropriate to honor a guest visiting the committee today, as she can speak directly to the importance of a quality science education - and she can do so quite well, I might add. This honoree is Neela Thangada, the winner of the Discovery Channel Young Scientist Challenge, and her mother, Mrudula Rao Thangada. Neela was named "Top Young Scientist" at an awards ceremony yesterday evening for her project, "Effects of Various Nutrient Concentrations on the Cloning of the Eye of the *Solanum Tuberosum* at Multiple Stages" or, in laymen's terms, she set out to explore potato cloning.

I had the chance to meet with her and her mother before the hearing, and was impressed with her enthusiasm for science and discovery and her ability to effectively speak about her research. She is indeed an incredible young lady.

Her trip to the House Science Committee today from her home in Texas was the result of an important public-private partnership initiated by the Discovery Channel. Every year since 1999, Discovery has launched the competition in partnership with Science Service to nurture the next generation of American scientists at a critical age when interest in science begins to decline. The cutting-edge competition gives 40 of the nation's top middle school students the opportunity to demonstrate their scientific know-how and push the limits of their knowledge in the quest for the title of America's "Top Young Scientist of the Year."

More than 9,500 middle school students have formally entered the Challenge since its inception, and these students are drawn from an initial pool of 75,000 students annually. Previous winners have attained more than $500,000 in scholarship awards and participated in science-related trips that have taken them to the far corners of the globe, from the Galapagos Islands to the Ukraine.

This year's finalists traveled to Washington, D.C., to compete in team-based, interactive challenges designed around the theme of "Forces of Nature." In the wake of the recent natural disasters that ravaged the Gulf Coast of the United States and Southeast Asia, each student faced simulated challenges - from fog banks to hurricanes to tsunamis - that utilized their broad range of knowledge in order to understand the implications and scope of natural disasters.

Public-private partnerships such as these exist to challenge and engage our students and we must continue to support such programs. However, we must also better prepare and inspire our math and science teachers to provide the highest-quality education for all students throughout the country. We can start by implementing some of the recommendations laid out here today.