

# NSF Gets Huge Funding Boost, Yet Won't Thank a Republican Supporter



By Alex Berezow — May 22, 2018



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

Let's pretend that you're a government funded scientist, like many professors and academics. Your entire livelihood depends on the largesse of taxpayers, politicians, and bureaucrats. If you asked the government for \$1 million to fund your lab and its response was, "We love your research so much, here's \$2.5 million," what would be your response?

Professors I know would have been popping champagne bottles (microbiologists, after all, like to drink), inviting the whole team to celebrate in stupefied disbelief. Everyone's jobs were secure, and they could continue their work studying a fascinating aspect of the natural world.

Some scientists, however, appear incapable of normal human emotion. *Science* magazine [reports](#) [2] that when a Congressman, who wanted to see a telescope project completed faster, boosted its anticipated funding in 2019 from \$49 million to \$123 million, the National Science Foundation (NSF) saw a conspiracy: "We don't know the intent of the report language and I don't think we can speculate." The director of the project said, "It's a strange thing. We've never seen it before."

Do you know what I've never seen before? Scientists that ungrateful.

## The NSF Looks a Gift Horse in the Mouth

These responses are all the more baffling given that this particular Congressman has done this before. He has used his power and influence to funnel money to science projects that he likes. For instance, he wants NASA to get to Jupiter's moon Europa faster, so he gave them more money than they requested.

And he isn't shy about his shilling for science. The same article in *Science* quotes the politician as

saying that he hopes "everyone involved [will] step up the pace so they can produce science as soon as possible."

Even better, he hates the politicization of science. The following quote by the Congressman is pure music to our ears:

*"I think it's critical to protect NSF—and the space program and scientific inquiry in general—from political pressure from either the right or the left... Science should never be politicized. Scientists should always follow the facts, and as a policymaker, I need accurate, unbiased data to make good decisions."*

Let's review. We have a Congressman who:

- Appreciates knowledge for the sake of knowledge.
- Understands the importance of funding basic scientific inquiry.
- Refuses to allow science to be influenced by political pressures from the left or right.
- Wants more science right now.
- Puts his money where his mouth is and funds science to a greater extent than what was requested by scientists themselves.

Yet, the telescope director's response to the boost in funding was that "it won't speed things up much, because we're not cash-limited."

How about this response, instead: "Wow! We are absolutely speechless by this generous show of support from Congress. Thank you!" Or, "We may not be able to get this telescope built faster, but we will put these extra funds to good use to ensure that this project delivers far more than we ever dreamed."

What explains this bizarre, muted response from the telescope director and NSF? Could it be that the Congressman in question, John Culberson, is a Republican? Given the blatantly political nature of movements like [March for Science](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, it's difficult to come to any other conclusion on how a politician's lavish and vocal support of basic science can be met with such ingratitude.

Astrophysicist and Forbes blogger Ethan Siegel seems to agree. In an e-mail, he wrote, "I will never understand why people can't speak well of someone whose ideologies differ from them when they legitimately help."

Whatever the reason for the sourpuss attitude, scientists should smile when they receive a giant bag of money. If I was in Rep. Culberson's shoes, I would be tempted to give the money to someone who actually would be grateful to receive it -- like a gaggle of microbiologists.

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/22/nsf-gets-huge-funding-boost-yet-wont-thank-republican-supporter-13000>

**Links**

[1] [https://www.storyblocks.com/stock-image/scientist-lab-researcher-chemist-cartoon-b7zlnfmwx\\_wj6gsgmz3](https://www.storyblocks.com/stock-image/scientist-lab-researcher-chemist-cartoon-b7zlnfmwx_wj6gsgmz3)

[2] <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/05/surprise-house-spending-panel-gives-nsf-far-more-money-telescope-it-requested>

[3] <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/04/19/march-for-science-was-just-excuse-to-attack-trump-and-republicans.html>