Testimony Mike Leherr:

It's a privilege to be here Chairman Gordon and ranking member Congressman Hall and all the members of the Committee for this opportunity to present testimony on the importance of enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education.

I am Mike Leherr, Plant Manager of Alcoa-Texarkana Works. Alcoa-Texarkana is a manufacturer of aluminum sheet. With highly sophisticated mills and equipment, we convert predominately scrap aluminum into a finished rolled product for use in commercial trucks, trailers, boats, appliances, automotive, and general industrial applications. We supply customers throughout North America. Our workforce is made up of Engineers, Technicians, Chemists, and Computer Science professionals, Accountants, Operators and Maintenance crafts. Approximately 50% of our salary workforce has professional technical degrees in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering or Math. Additionally, many of our purchased services and products require technical training and qualifications as well.

As a business leader, I am responsible for ensuring that Alcoa-Texarkana remains competitive in today's global environment, in-fact Alcoa-Texarkana directly competes with manufacturing facilities all over the world for our business. In order to remain competitive, now and into the future, the Alcoa-Texarkana workforce, as well as other businesses, must continue to find ways to apply new knowledge, develop new technologies, and implement next generation manufacturing practices. The foundation of this future must start with strong STEM education. Technology change and globalization have driven the need for higher order skill sets for today's and tomorrow's businesses.

Alcoa-Texarkana, as well as other manufacturers in the area, has increasingly found it more difficult to find and recruit highly skilled people with strong background in Sciences, Engineering, and Math. We find ourselves casting a wider and wider net to find highly skilled recruits. We also are seeing an increasing number of requests to sponsor visas for non-US citizens with each professional posting. It is evident that the local and national availability of highly skilled people with is getting smaller.

A strong STEM competency is not only needed for our technical professionals but also our Operators and Maintenance craftspeople. Alcoa-Texarkana continues to increase engagement of employees and rely on all our employees applying statistical methods, problem solving, re-engineering efforts. It is not uncommon for Operators and Maintenance craftspeople to re-design equipment and processes. Our ability to succeed and compete into the future greatly depends on our ability to recruit people of all disciplines with strong STEM knowledge.

The STEM education program that has been developed here at The Martha and Josh Morris Mathematics and Engineering Elementary School is exemplary. I believe this school will provide students with the knowledge, ability and most importantly, the enthusiasm and desire to excel in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

Alcoa-Texarkana plays a key role in the community through its economic impact, Alcoa Foundation grants, and volunteer activities through our "Neighbors Committee." Communities matter to Alcoa. Communities hold our franchise to operate and we need their resources, infrastructure, markets, and workforce to thrive. In turn, we owe them our integrity, careful stewardship of the environment, our ability to provide jobs and community support. Our future is linked to the future of our community. It is because we understand this linkage that we support STEM education efforts. Alcoa-Texarkana has played a role in educational quality and encouraging young people to study math and sciences. We have actively supported STEM education at all levels. These efforts include:

- At the University Level, Alcoa-Texarkana was one of the first companies to invest in the campaign to bring the College of Engineering and Computer Information Sciences to A+M Texarkana. Alcoa Foundation Grants were used to develop a Bachelor of Science Degree program and purchase equipment for the College of Engineering and Computer Information Sciences Program at Texas A+M-Texarkana.

- At the High School level Alcoa-Texarkana Engineers participate in "Learning for Life" programs where Engineers discuss science and technology careers with 8th and 9th grade students. Additionally, Alcoa-Texarkana Engineers lead "Adopt a Classroom" through Junior Achievement.

- At the Elementary level, Alcoa-Texarkana and the Alcoa Foundation have given foundation grants to support Math and Engineering Magnet school in Arkansas. We also provided a grant to the Morris Elementary School for the purchase and use of high powered telescopes. The use of such equipment will help young children get enthused about the sciences by seeing it in use. Additionally, Alcoa-Texarkana has also been in discussion with Morris Elementary about a working exhibit on renewable energy.

I, as well as many here, want to see Alcoa-Texarkana be here for a long time. Giving students the tools and passion for learning more about Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math will be a vital piece into making that happen. Increasing STEM education is critical for the ability of all Americans to compete globally.

I applaud the leadership of Texas Independent School District, A+M –Texarkana, and the community for acting and bringing enhanced STEM education to Texarkana. I also applaud this Committee for its efforts in enhancing STEM education in this country. Thank you