



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Haley Stevens (D-MI)
of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology

Subcommittee on Research and Technology Hearing:
Setting the Standards: Strengthening U.S. Leadership in Technical Standards

March 17, 2022

Good morning and welcome to this hearing of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology to explore technical standards and their role in society, innovation, and U.S. competitiveness. A special welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses.

Technical standards are often overlooked in conversations about U.S. competitiveness, as policymakers focus on more easily understood topics like taxes, trade, and regulation. However, technical standards are essential to U.S. competitiveness and to the global economy. Standards ensure your car is safe, your building is resilient, and for those of you tuning in online, standards ensure you can stream this hearing from your device wherever you are.

One of the greatest things about the American standards system is that the idea with the most technical merit wins the day. Many international standards bodies have adopted that model in no small part because of its success. For the last century, U.S. industry has been a dominant player in international standards. For example, the Michigan's own Ford and GM helped set the auto-safety standards of yesterday and are pioneering the electric vehicle standards of tomorrow.

Other nations – both our allies and our adversaries – are increasingly viewing technical standards as a key part of their domestic technology competitiveness strategy. Within the last year, both the European Union and the Chinese government laid out ambitious plans to gain supremacy in international standards setting. These goals are legitimate as long as those nations continue to adhere to the merit-based model for standards development. However, we have also seen reports of nations attempting underhanded tactics like coordinated voting to pass suboptimal standards that favor their domestic industries.

To maintain U.S. competitiveness and push back on unfair tactics, we must ensure U.S. stakeholders are well represented and well prepared at standards setting meetings. At the same time, we must be cautious about any heavy-handed government policies that risk doing more harm than good. The United States has long benefited from an open, industry-led, bottom-up approach to most standard setting. Proposals that respond to real or perceived risks to U.S.

competitiveness by restricting participation or asserting more government control will almost certainly come back to bite us.

There is no silver bullet, but there is one obvious step we can take now and that is to properly resource NIST to do its important job. NIST monitors U.S. representation in international standards bodies and leads the intergovernmental committee charged with coordinating U.S. engagement in international bodies. NIST also plays the role of convener, bringing together stakeholders to facilitate the development of standards that meet national priorities.

Importantly, we cannot expect success if Federal agencies charged with advancing U.S. competitiveness must work with too few resources, limited authorities, and crumbling infrastructure. Recently, the House passed my bipartisan legislation, The NIST for the Future Act, which would increase the agency's STRS budget by over 18 percent this year—and double it over the next decade. As it appears now, NIST simply does not have the resources or the staff to be fully engaged in international standard setting activities. Looking ahead, I encourage my colleagues in Congress to consider the importance of bolstering NIST at its core.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today. I'm looking forward to hearing your ideas for how we can better support U.S. stakeholders in international standards.