

OPENING STATEMENT

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of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Oversight
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
Beyond Bitcoin: Emerging Applications for Blockchain Technology
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Thank you Chairman Abraham and Chairwoman Comstock for holding this hearing on emerging applications for blockchain technology. And thank you to the expert panel for being here this morning to help us understand the promises and potential limitations of this technology.

As my colleagues have noted, blockchain technologies have the potential, among other benefits, to increase security and reliability of information and decrease fraud and transaction costs across many sectors of our economy. Blockchain technologies also raise important legal and regulatory questions, including how to balance privacy and security while maintaining accountability.

As NIST made clear in its recent Blockchain Technology Overview publication, blockchain remains a nascent and poorly-understood technology. Between the myriad potential applications, the policy considerations, and the possibility of quantum computing rendering the current system of cryptography obsolete, there are many important research questions. These include constructive technologies for blockchain, new cryptographic methods, common standards and protocols, and how blockchain can best be applied across different sectors and for different purposes.

I was surprised that a simple search of active National Science Foundation research awards using the search terms ‘blockchain’ and ‘distributed ledger’ yielded only 16 results. No doubt this total far undercounts the number of NSF awards that may have relevance to blockchain technology, and I imagine that other agencies and the private sector are also funding research in this area. But perhaps this also reflects just how nascent a field of research blockchain is. Just in the last year or two, several science and engineering journals have issued calls for submissions for special issues focused on blockchain and distributed ledger technologies.

Today’s hearing is a 101 for Committee Members – a chance for us to unpack some of the mystery and mythology around blockchain technology and develop a better understanding of the potential and pitfalls alike. Our panel today represents a diverse set of expertise and viewpoints on blockchain technology that will illuminate some of the sectors where blockchain is having and will have an impact. I look forward to the testimony and discussion.

I yield back.