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Wednesday Q+A with Haley Stevens

The chair of the House Science Research and Technology Subcommittee previews the conference-committee negotiations over the two chambers' China-competition bills.



Philip Athey

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Rep. Haley Stevens is one of the 81 members of the House chosen as a conferee to reconcile the chambers' respective China-competition bills. As the chair of the House Science Research and Technology Subcommittee, Stevens has played a major role in putting together several parts of the America COMPETES Act. Stevens, a Michigan Democrat, spoke with Philip Athey about the upcoming conference. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

What are your biggest priorities going into this conference?

I am very eager to see us get the House Science provisions hammered out. And that's in addition to the CHIPS Act funding, which—as a member of Congress from Michigan who sees this on the news every day, front-page headlines, seeing this impact our auto industry or medical-device industry or aerospace industry and our overall competitiveness, I'm very enthusiastic about the CHIPS component, just as I was so enthusiastic about the science-research component, the supply-chain components of this bill, and the [boost] for our STEM workforce. This is called the America COMPETES Act because it's overall a competitiveness agenda for the United States of America. It's reinvestment in our industrial base and our manufacturing workforce. ... It really energizes me.

There are some differences in the House and the Senate version. Specifically, the House has a lot of social-justice measures. How important is it for you to get that into the final bill?

What we heard from researchers and academics and stakeholders all over the country in hearing after hearing, markup after markup, is we are leaving American talent behind. We are leaving American talent behind demographically and geographically, and that's no longer going to be acceptable if we want to compete as successfully as we could on the global playing field. So, when you talk about social justice, when you talk about equity, when you talk about diversity, when you talk about an inclusive STEM workforce, you're not doing it right if you are not doing the inclusivity piece. I'm really proud that those provisions are in this bill, and I'm going to fight very hard to make sure that they're included in the final package because they need to be.

To get this bill through the Senate, you need to maintain support of at least 10 Republican senators. How do you balance getting some of those House provisions that the Senate hasn't agreed to into the bill without pushing so far that you lose that Republican support?

We want to see it be successful for both chambers, get it to the president's desk for signature. This is a very new moment in United States lawmaking. For decades, there was a partisan divide over spending on R&D, spending on scientific research, spending to even address or mention climate change.

Certainly, I've been steeped in the securitization of our supply chain, the semiconductor industry for years. I came to Congress wanting to champion these things. And I ran for Congress because there was an *Atlantic Monthly* article [that asked,] "Are we going to face a lost generation of scientific research in the United States?" given the former president's budget proposals in the year 2017. Now, fast forward just half a decade later, you've got Democrats and Republicans at the table. Think about it. The science bills from the House when they were going through committee passed unanimously. ... The original version of this bill in the Senate passed with well over 60 votes. In terms of what is going to motivate people to actually vote for this final package, you've got to look at it clear as day. We're going to look at our global dynamic, we're going to look at our ability to make and sell internationally ... and you're either going to vote for it or you're going vote against it.

I really see a lot of times with the other side of the aisle, when they're casting these "no" votes on things like infrastructure, "no" votes on the budget, they are voting against a successful United States, a successful government. ... Now, that's not the negotiating place. We're really right now in a place where Democrats and Republicans across the ideological spectrum and across both chambers are in this conference committee, wanting to get the job done. ... I'm optimistic about it.

Outside of the National Defense Authorization Act, conference committees aren't super common in Congress right now. Is that a sign of how important this bill is?

If you look at CHIPS alone, this is a multi-decade deindustrialization that has occurred in the United States of America. There's a place in the United States of America where the chip was innovated; the industry, semiconductors, was innovated in the United States of America. In the '90s we were making 40 percent of these puppies in the United States. Now it's down to 12 percent, 13 percent. We're at a risk because of the supply-chain disruptions. The tide rolled out with COVID-19, but it was rolling out on the American workforce.

This is not a wave-the-wand type of deal, quick-fix solution. ... We will do the workforce piece out of that bill. We will do the regional-innovation strategies out of this bill. I think that's going to bring people to the table.

What are your feelings about being one of the conferees?

This is an honor of a lifetime, truly. As somebody who has been steeped in the manufacturing-policy world, the manufacturing sciences, the workforce development, the chips industry for a very long time, I couldn't be more honored to be on the conference committee as the congresswoman for Oakland County, Michigan. The part of southeastern Michigan that is home of Automation Alley, home to the largest concentration of automotive-supplier jobs—this is the lifeblood of the regional economy that I represent in the Congress. I've got a seat at the table to negotiate out a catalytic deal for a multi-decade success trajectory that I believe this legislation will put us on and put Michigan on. It's not just Michigan. ... This is something for the nation.