

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
“Disrupter Series: Advanced Materials and Production”
March 15, 2017

In the last Congress, this subcommittee examined several emerging technologies that are creating new opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and increasing consumer choice in today’s increasingly digital world. From the Internet of Things and health apps, to drones and robotics, and the revolutionary capabilities of 3-D printing, many of these technologies are transforming commerce and creating new opportunities for economic prosperity in America for generations to come.

Today our Disrupter Series continues with a look at innovative materials and production methods that are the building blocks for some of the emerging technologies that could change how we see the world. The work that is taking place at universities around the country is truly groundbreaking and today is an opportunity to learn first-hand from some of our top minds in academia. I look forward to hearing about the full spectrum of their work – from basic research to how they shepherd their projects through to commercialization.

For example, graphene {pronounced: GRAF-FEEN} is hailed as a discovery that will do for the Internet of Things what silicon did for the chip industry. We have not reached the point of mass commercialization yet; however, there have been advancements in patenting and licensing these discoveries for some applications.

Additionally, composite materials incorporating graphene have increased strength and conductivity properties that are not found in more traditional materials. These composites could have interesting applications in the automotive and infrastructure space. I look forward to hearing more from Dr. Tour about his work on graphene and the U.S.’s position relative to other nations.

There is also the opportunity to work with traditional materials and create new composites that could solve some of the competing cost and safety questions. For example, new bridges and car bumpers could both benefit from taking into consideration new technologies. I am interested in hearing from our panelists in industry and academia about their experience approaching investors and clients about their products and services.

As we look at the relationship between job creation and our nation’s infrastructure it is critical that we understand the marketplace and what is currently in development. Remember, simply because a material is new does not mean that it is a realistic replacement for more traditional materials. However, there may be improved safety benefits and long-term repair and replacement cost savings in some cases. These are all worthwhile considerations for stakeholders to consider and important factors I look forward to discussing today.

I am pleased that the Disrupter Series is continuing this Congress, and I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses. Thank you for being here.