Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Full Committee Markup of H.R. 2984, H.R. 2600, H.R. 2313, H.R. 2613, H.R. 1223, and H.R. 3029

April 29, 2025

Good morning. Thank you for joining us for our first markup of the 119th Congress.

We've kicked off the year with a strong start, holding a series of hearings focused on many pressing issues across our science and technology sectors.

Today, we build on that momentum by advancing six important bills that will promote innovation, drive industrial modernization, and strengthen America's economic and global competitiveness.

First, we will consider three space-related bills that aim to enhance our scientific research, increase astronaut safety, and support continued U.S. leadership in space exploration.

H.R. 2984, the ASTRO Act, is a bill I am proud to sponsor. It originated from discussions I had with our nation's astronauts following their brave missions.

After spending extended time in space, astronauts often experience medical impairments upon returning home, making it challenging to operate motor vehicles.

However, they are required to participate in critical medical studies to inform future exploration efforts, which involves traveling to and from the Johnson Space Center until they are medically cleared.

The ASTRO Act is sensible legislation that eliminates procedural obstacles and ensures astronauts have reliable, hassle-free transportation for medical evaluations until they are fully cleared.

This bill will aid their recovery, protect their health, and uphold the integrity of NASA's human spaceflight operations.

I am honored to advocate for improved astronaut safety and remain committed to cutting unnecessary red tape in our space sector.

Next, we will consider H.R. 2600, the ASCEND Act, sponsored by Representatives Hurd and Bonamici.

NASA's Commercial Satellite Data Acquisition program expanded the agency's observational capabilities in recent years by leveraging high-quality, cost-effective data from the commercial space sector.

The ASCEND Act formally authorizes this vital initiative, ensuring its long-term effectiveness, leveraging commercial data, and meeting NASA's operational requirements.

Representative McClellan, a former member of the SST Committee, leads our final space bill, H.R. 2313, the Celestial Time Standardization Act.

As we pursue ambitious missions to the Moon, Mars, and beyond, establishing a coordinated celestial time standard is essential to ensuring their success.

This bill creates a unified time standard for space operators, allowing the U.S. and its international partners to effectively coordinate position, navigation, timing, communication, and research across the space domain.

By leading the development of these standards, the U.S. will reinforce its leadership in space exploration and strengthen its global competitiveness.

Shifting gears to the energy sector, our next bill addresses the needs of our nation's aging infrastructure.

The U.S. pipeline network spans nearly 2.8 million miles across the country and averages more than 60 years in age. To maintain these systems and adapt to emerging fuel sources, we must support research and technology that improve safety, reliability, and longevity.

H.R. 2613, the Next Generation Pipelines Research and Development Act, strengthens public-private partnerships and advances federal research, development, and demonstration efforts to modernize existing infrastructure and develop next-generation pipeline systems.

Thank you to Representatives Weber and Ross for recognizing these challenges and taking action to revitalize our pipeline network through this important legislation.

Lastly, we will consider two research and technology bills that provide important security upgrades to our research systems and promote innovative advancements within our scientific community.

Our U.S. Academic Research Fleet conducts vital oceanographic research in some of the world's most isolated regions.

H.R. 1223, the ANCHOR Act, will ensure these mobile laboratories have modern and reliable cyberinfrastructure and communications systems to meet today's research and security demands.

I want to thank Representatives Fong and Stevens for their work in bringing this legislation forward to address key gaps in the fleet's cybersecurity posture.

Our final bill focuses on strengthening and protecting our nation's rapidly growing biotechnology sector.

Synthesizing nucleic acids is a common practice in advanced biotech research, but the lack of consistent security screening has created critical vulnerabilities.

H.R. 3029, the Nucleic Acid Standards for Biosecurity Act, empowers NIST to establish a public-private consortium that will develop technical standards and best practices for screening synthetic nucleic acids.

This stakeholder-driven effort will equip the industry with expert guidance and cutting-edge tools, positioning the U.S. to lead in safeguarding essential biotechnology innovation while reducing national security risks.

Thank you to Reps. Salinas and McCormick for their leadership in crafting this legislation.

Once again, I want to express my appreciation for our members' bipartisan collaboration in presenting such future-focused bills.

I look forward to a productive markup as we continue working toward our goal of restoring America's leadership in transformative technologies across all sectors.