Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Research and Technology Subcommittee Hearing:
Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Work
Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Thank you, Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Member Baird, for holding this hearing. I would also like to welcome this esteemed panel of witnesses and thank each of you for accommodating the rescheduling of today's hearing. We are here today to discuss an urgent challenge facing the country. Artificial intelligence is a rapidly advancing, sophisticated technology that promises to transform the way we live and work.

As Chairwoman, I take seriously the responsibility entrusted to this Committee to support the nation's research and innovation enterprise for the benefit of society. We are increasingly feeling pressure from our global competitors, particularly in the case of AI. As countries like the United Kingdom, Germany, and China invest heavily in this technology, there is a strong sense of urgency to race headlong toward technological maturity and widespread adoption.

I want to urge caution. We must take the time to draw upon lessons learned from past technological disruptions, assess the opportunities and potential risks, and implement a coordinated national strategy to ensure the benefits of AI are enjoyed by everyone. We are here to explore one of the primary concerns associated with AI – its potential impact on the workforce. Many Americans are understandably worried that AI-driven automation and robots will make their jobs obsolete.

Research has a critical role to play in informing how AI is integrated into the American workforce. Research can help employers understand the benefits and risks of this technology. Just because it seems like a task can be performed by an AI system, does not mean it can or should be, at least not without a human still in the loop. Research can also improve our understanding of the human-technology relationship. This can inform decisions regarding how best to integrate AI into the workflow so it can both complement and enhance the value of the worker. Research can advance the development of effective practices for retraining the current workforce and for ensuring workers have the flexibility to be lifelong learners. Research can provide students and those pursuing a career change with a clear understanding of emerging industries and occupations, so they can chart an education path best suited to their goals.

Artificial intelligence holds immense promise to spur economic growth and make our lives easier. We are at a critical point in the development of this technology, and we must ensure we have the research knowledge base necessary to maximize these benefits for everyone.

I look forward to today's testimony and discussion and I yield back.