Opening Statement of Chairman Jay Obernolte

Research and Technology Subcommittee Hearing
Robots Made in America: Advancing U.S. Leadership in Manufacturing and Automation
April 21, 2026

Robotics have catalyzed the American economy for over a century. Articulated robots, with joints like human arms, have long served as essential components for handling, welding, and assembly in industrial manufacturing. Robotics is critical to industries ranging from automotive manufacturing to space exploration and healthcare. The potential for robots to assist and enhance human capabilities is vast, and a new phase of advancement is underway.

For many years, humanoid robots were seen as the stuff of science fiction. But with the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), so-called "physical AI"—the integration of AI into robotic systems—may be the key to unlocking new ways to deploy robotics across the United States. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy's AI Action Plan notes the importance of this intersection between AI and robotics. Physical AI could unleash a robotics renaissance, and America must remain at the forefront.

The United States must act decisively. The Chinese Communist Party has invested billions in its robotics industry and has pursued an aggressive strategy to dominate the global market. As technologies like physical AI advance, it is more important than ever for the United States to adopt a national robotics strategy to support manufacturing, bolster our economy, and assist the American worker.

That is why, earlier this year, I introduced the National Commission on Robotics Act. This bipartisan legislation would establish a national commission tasked with evaluating the United States' competitiveness in robotics. The commission—comprised of experts from academia, industry, and the public sector—will provide policy recommendations to strengthen American leadership in robotics, helping Congress develop forward-looking policies that keep America competitive in this new era of innovation.

A new vision for robotics could help solve labor shortages, increase U.S. productivity in manufacturing, and support logistics. In the future, humanoid robots could serve as caretakers for the elderly or act as supplemental workers that assist humans in performing the most physically demanding tasks in factories, thereby protecting the health of American workers.

Academic institutions across the country play a central role in advancing robotics research. The National Science Foundation (NSF) invests in fundamental research in robotics through its Foundational Research in Robotics (FRR) program, which supports robotic systems with both

computational capability and physical complexity. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is also critical in developing standards for safety and innovation. Together, these efforts support key areas of research and development, including collaborative robots, dexterous manipulation, mobility, and industrial autonomous vehicles.

Robotics research and innovation are essential for maintaining America's leadership in technological advancement. Understanding the current state of robotics in the United States will help inform the Committee's work as we consider a national robotics strategy. I thank our witnesses for being here and appreciate their willingness to help the Subcommittee assess U.S. robotics research and development.