COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Hearing
Powering America's AI Future: Federal Permitting Challenges for Data Center Infrastructure
February 24, 2026

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We come together today to discuss a transformative technology that will define global leadership in the future of science and innovation – artificial intelligence. As I noted in my recent *Washington Times* op-ed, America must win the artificial intelligence race with China if we are to remain the world's leading innovator and economic engine.

Artificial intelligence is not just algorithms and software. At its core are data centers — massive facilities packed with high-density computing equipment operating around the clock. These centers train breakthrough models, scale research, and transform ideas into technologies that reshape entire industries.

But data centers are far more than collections of servers. They are enormous consumers of electricity, requiring reliable, abundant, and continuous power. According to the International Energy Agency, U.S. data centers consumed 183 terawatt-hours of electricity in 2024 — more than four percent of the nation's total—and demand is projected to grow significantly.

Scaling AI is not just about smarter algorithms; it is about having the power to run them. Today, our ability to build, operate, and expand data centers depends on whether our energy infrastructure can keep pace.

China understands this. Its state-directed model pairs AI deployment with massive investments in data center infrastructure and energy capacity. By aligning computing demand with power availability, China is building the foundation to scale AI rapidly and efficiently.

In contrast, the United States faces structural hurdles that threaten our competitiveness. Permitting delays for power generation and transmission, environmental review bottlenecks, and regulatory uncertainty slow the construction and expansion of critical infrastructure. These are not abstract policy concerns. They directly affect whether American companies can grow, whether researchers can access the computing power they need, and whether our nation can maintain leadership in AI.

Reliable energy and modern infrastructure are not optional — they are foundational. Without them, innovation slows, investment shifts overseas, and our leadership position erodes.

Maintaining America's leadership in AI requires deliberate action — sustained investment in research and development, protection of intellectual property, cultivation of a skilled workforce,

secure supply chains, and policies that encourage responsible innovation while safeguarding national security.

This Committee has long championed investments in research and advanced computing. If we fail to lead, we risk allowing authoritarian systems to dictate the future of this transformative technology. But if we act decisively — guided by democratic principles, economic strength, and strategic foresight — the United States can secure its position at the forefront of AI innovation and ensure that the technologies shaping the next century reflect our values.

Winning the AI race is about more than training the next model or building the largest neural network. It is about constructing the physical systems—data centers, grids, and transmission networks—that make large-scale computation possible. If we fail to provide the infrastructure our innovators need, we will not simply fall behind China in AI research; we will fall behind in economic growth, scientific leadership, and the creation of high-quality jobs for American workers.

This is not a theoretical debate. It is about whether America remains the global leader in science and technology. And it is about ensuring that our innovation ecosystem—our researchers, companies, workers—has the foundation it needs to thrive.

I look forward to today's discussion about how this Committee can help make that happen.

Thank you, and I yield back.