Written Testimony of

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America's Last Mile: The Case for a National Site Readiness Fund

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Chairman Moolenaar, Ranking Member Khanna, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

While I am based in the DC area, my work allows me to travel the country to some of the most exciting communities in America on behalf of advanced manufacturing companies looking for a home for scale manufacturing. My clients span energy, semiconductors, batteries, critical minerals, aerospace and defense. I also advise cities working to win these projects, so I sit on both sides of the table.

A client reaches out to me and tells me exactly where they want to build. It might be a battery maker, a chip supplier, a grid equipment manufacturer or a defense contractor. They have the capital, a federal award or a customer with a delivery date, and a clear preference: a particular state, near a particular university, close to a particular supplier.

Then we begin looking for the site. Too often, it isn't there. So, we move on. Not because the place lacked talent or ambition, but because nobody had the land ready, and my client doesn't have three years to wait.

I have this conversation more than you would believe.

Every search starts with people, power and place. Is there a workforce? Is there enough power, soon enough? Does the place have the logistics, suppliers and leadership to support the project? Plenty of American places pass that test.

But the final decision comes down to time, risk and speed. How fast can we get in the ground? What could go wrong before first production? Who can promise a date and keep it? People, power and place get you on the list. Time, risk and speed decide who wins. That is where site readiness becomes the deciding factor.

I propose a National Site Readiness Fund. My argument in one line: America's reindustrialization is running into a wall, and the wall is real estate.

We are not losing to China on technology or talent. We are losing on speed.

China prepares the ground first

Beijing understands something we have forgotten: you cannot reindustrialize without preparing the ground first. Chinese industrial parks deliver land already graded, connected to roads, power, water, sewer, gas and telecom, and approved before an investor arrives. Planners even have a name for it, the "seven connections and one leveling."

You can see the result in a single project. Tesla signed with Shanghai in July 2018, broke ground in January 2019 and delivered its first cars that December. Its battery storage factory in the same zone went from groundbreaking to first product in nine months.

And China is not slowing down. Morgan Stanley Research estimates China may spend up to $12 trillion through 2035 on infrastructure, factory upgrades and new capacity.[1] That spending is backed by a financing system built to fund factories even when returns take years. That is patient capital, exactly what American site readiness lacks. In October, the bipartisan National Security Commission on Robotics for Advanced Manufacturing found in its preliminary report that America leads in robotics innovation but is not on track to lead in putting that innovation to work at scale.

Our process turns local voice into national delay

Now compare what my clients face here. A rezoning goes to the planning commission, then the board, then a hearing, then an appeal. A substation sits in a utility's queue for years. Nobody owns the job of assembling the land. I believe in local voice, but stacked on top of each other, these layers of local approval let a single meeting delay a project of national importance by a year or more.

We should not copy China's system. But we need an answer to its speed. The 2025 National Security Strategy says cultivating American industrial strength must become the highest priority of national economic policy. That strategy is only as fast as the ground we can build on. Our diplomacy already gets this: Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg's Pax Silica initiative is helping plan a 4,000-acre economic security zone in the Philippines. If we will prepare thousands of acres for allied production overseas, we should do the same in Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Build power ahead of the factory

The first thing every client asks me is not about tax credits. It is how many megawatts, how soon and at what price. Factories, data centers and the grid are competing for the same substations and the same land, and when new load arrives without new supply, families feel it in their utility bills. China builds power ahead of the factories that need it. We plan power after the deal. This fund must treat substations, interconnection and on-site generation as core infrastructure, so new industry strengthens the grid instead of raising everyone else's bills.

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1. Morgan Stanley Research, https://www.morganstanley.com/insights/articles/china-next-industrial-revolution-industry-5-outlook.

Put site dollars in the hands of places, not startups

The Department of Energy, the Commerce Department, the Pentagon and the Export-Import Bank are putting loans, grants, contracts and equity behind American production at a scale we haven't seen in generations, across two administrations. But the faster Washington asks companies to deliver, the less patience they have for a place that isn't ready. A company can prefer Ohio all it wants. If there is no site, it moves on.

Much of that money also goes to companies that are venture-backed, early-stage and building their first plant. I represent many of them and believe in them. Their genius is technology, not land assembly or negotiating a substation. The Robotics Commission found that venture capital is often poorly matched to hardware timelines. When we route site work through a startup's balance sheet, we pay retail, tie a public asset to one company's survival, and start the clock too late.

Put those dollars in the hands of the places that know how to build. Cities, counties, ports, land banks and regional development organizations have the buying power, the relationships and the staying power. A ready site they control outlasts any single tenant.

Cleveland shows the model works

In 2023, Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb and the City Council put $50 million in federal recovery funds into an independent nonprofit, the Site Readiness for Good Jobs Fund, to buy, assemble, clean and prepare vacant industrial land. It has stitched old factory parcels into a 37-acre site the city could never offer before, launched the roughly 350-acre Midline district on the East Side, and pulled in state, tax credit and philanthropic dollars. I've worked alongside that team. The lesson is simple: the money matters, but the vehicle matters more. The limit is scale. Fifty million dollars gets one city started.

The proposal: $10 billion a year for five years

I'm asking the Committee to champion a National Site Readiness Fund at $10 billion a year for five years, roughly what Congress committed to semiconductors alone through CHIPS. We funded the factories. Now we have to fund the ground they stand on.

- **It funds places, not companies.** Certified local and regional site readiness organizations apply competitively.
- **It is matched.** Federal dollars unlock through a state match, a binding jobs commitment, or a site tied to a critical technology such as semiconductors, batteries, grid equipment, nuclear, pharmaceuticals, critical minerals or defense production. Meeting more than one earns a larger federal share.

- **It pays for the hard part.** Land assembly, cleanup, demolition, and the power, water, rail and roads to the fence line.
- **It rewards speed.** Places that pre-zone land and commit to fast, predictable approvals score higher.
- **It recycles and protects.** Proceeds fund the next site. No funded site can go to a company controlled by a foreign adversary, and idle sites face clawbacks.

Congress has started down this road. The bipartisan ONSHORE Act created a site development program at the Economic Development Administration. But that program is authorized at roughly $100 million a year and is still waiting on full funding. China is building industrial cities.

A bipartisan answer to Beijing's bet

Beijing is betting that our political divisions will slow down our efforts to revitalize America's manufacturing sector, that every election resets the clock. Site readiness is how we prove that bet wrong.

This idea has real support on both sides of the aisle. The ONSHORE Act was written by a Democrat and two Republicans, one now Vice President. A Democratic mayor built Cleveland's fund, while Republican governors across the South built some of the best state programs in the country. Senators Ted Budd and Elissa Slotkin are co-chairing the Robotics Commission side by side. Red states and blue states are losing the same projects for the same reason: the land isn't ready.

A bipartisan fund would tell Beijing what no speech can: America's commitment to building does not change with the election calendar.

In Conclusion

The money is there. The technology is there. The talent is there. What we are missing is the last mile, and the last mile is real estate.

I would welcome the chance, in this Congress or the next, to work with you and your staff on legislative language. My ask is simple: make site readiness a national economic and security priority, and fund it like one.

Thank you again to Chairman Moolenaar, Ranking Member Khanna, and the members of the Committee for your attention to this issue.

The views expressed in this testimony are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any organization with which he is affiliated.