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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith Hearing on American Competitiveness: The Role of R&D

Chairman Smith: The topic of today's hearing, the first for this Committee in this Congress, is "American Competitiveness: The Role of Research and Development." This is an appropriate hearing because much of the jurisdiction of this Committee relates to keeping America globally competitive.

America's ability to compete depends on whether we have the present vision to conduct the science that will define the future. As the wall behind me says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This Committee's goal—and today's hearing—is to help define that vision and ensure that America continues to be the leader of global innovation.

Our first hearing today will begin this process by examining the positive impact of today's R&D and looking forward to potential breakthrough innovations in the future.

Americans have always been innovators and explorers. Our ancestors crossed oceans, opened frontiers and ventured to explore a new continent and even travel to the Moon. From the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the International Space Station, from the telegraph to broadband internet, Americans have led the exploration of the unknown and developed inventions of the future.

In our short history we have produced world famous scientists and inventors like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison and Jonas Salk. But countless more American scientists who are not world famous nonetheless have been changing the world.

Have you heard of William Burroughs, John Bardeen or Ruth Benerito? According to the National Inventors Hall of Fame, Mr. Burroughs created the electronic calculator. Mr. Bardeen worked with the Nobel prize-winning team that developed the transistor and helped create Silicon Valley in California and Silicon Hills in Austin, Texas. And we can thank chemist Ruth Benerito for developing wrinkle-free cotton, which is in the shirts many Americans wear today.

But is America as innovative as it used to be? Some wonder if America's greatest technological achievements are behind us, and if other nations—like China and India—will soon surpass us, or perhaps already have.

Some nations are creating environments so attractive to global manufacturers that companies have relocated much of their activities to foreign soil. Our global trade imbalance is growing as we export less and import more, and today, this imbalance includes many high-tech products.

Other nations are changing their policies to become more competitive, and so should we. Fortunately, blazing trails into new frontiers is what America has always done best.

To set the stage for this Congress and to understand where America is heading, we have very knowledgeable witnesses testifying before us today. Each of them thoroughly understands both public and private research and development efforts as well as where our global competitors are headed.

Members of this Committee have the opportunity to work together on policies that will help America stay competitive. Today's hearing is a first step.

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