

OPENING STATEMENT

THE HONORABLE RALPH HALL (R-TX) **Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology**

Competitiveness and Innovation on the Committee's 50th Anniversary
with Bill Gates, Chairman of Microsoft
Wednesday, March 12, 2008
10:00 am
2318 Rayburn Office Building

Thank you Chairman Gordon, for this hearing celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Science and Technology Committee, and thank you, Mr. Gates, for your willingness to share your wealth of experience, your vision for the 21st century, and your suggestions for American competitiveness with our Committee. I also want to welcome my good friends and former colleagues, Bob Walker and Sherry Boehlert, who so ably led this Committee as Chairmen, as did Jim Sensenbrenner, who remains an active and respected Member of this Committee. *[Walker was Ranking Member 1989-1994 and Chairman 1995-1996. Sensenbrenner was Chairman 1997-2000, and Boehlert was Chairman 2001-2006.]*

I think it is important for us to take this time to reflect on the Committee's accomplishments over the last half a century, as well as explore why scientific enterprise and the work of the Committee are just as important to the U.S. today as they were during the Cold War when the Committee was created.

The Soviet launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957 was a wake-up call to Americans. I remember the feeling of going out to the back yard at night and watching the blinking light slowly cross the Texas sky. Every night that blinking light taunted us that America was no longer the most technologically advanced country in the world. The message was loud and clear that for the first time, the U.S. had to play catch-up. And catch-up we did.

In 1958, under the leadership of Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, whose Texas fourth district I now represent, the Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration was created. Shortly thereafter, the Committee created NASA and chartered a permanent House Committee on Science and Astronautics, our forerunner. About a decade later, the U.S. landed on the moon, proving without doubt that America was once again the World's technological leader.

The Science and Technology Committee has come a long way in 50 years, taking on some of America's biggest challenges, but we continue to be challenged. Experts have been churning out report after report, citing the U.S. as falling behind other countries in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education as well as long-term basic research funding. For these reasons, the President and a Republican-led Congress made it a priority to make the U.S. more economically competitive by promoting American innovation and STEM education. We have continued that trend in this Congress, and I am proud to be a supporter of the America COMPETES Act, which the President signed into law last year and which calls for a doubling of basic research funding for several agencies within our jurisdiction within a decade.

America COMPETES has been a top priority, but we have also pushed innovations in advanced technologies for energy, border security, and space exploration. Research into advanced

technologies can help prepare our first responders, secure our borders, and develop safe nanotechnology-based products, all the while, as Mr. Gates exemplifies, improving the economy and creating skilled jobs. Science informs good policy, and I am proud to have been part of the Science and Technology Committee for 27 years doing just that. From this seat, I have seen first-hand America's innovative capabilities. We have accomplished amazing and revolutionary things, and I am confident our finest hour is yet to come. American preeminence in the global economy depends on the contributions all of us make. Each of us...all levels of government, academia, parents, students AND industry...has an important role to play in keeping America competitive and ahead of the innovation curve.

I look forward to hearing your testimony today, Mr. Gates. I understand that both Microsoft and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are doing wonderful things particularly with regards to STEM education. I am especially eager to hear more about the 35 secondary STEM schools and regional resource centers you have established across Texas in partnership with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Communities Foundation of Texas, the Governor and the Texas Education Agency. I hope you plan to expand some of these terrific efforts to reach children in K-8 grades, as well. We all know that it is important to capture the attention and imagination of our youth at an early age –that is why I am so excited about what the Martha and Josh Morris Math and Engineering Elementary School in my district is accomplishing. This Committee will be holding a field hearing there in May to show how this local effort can serve as a model for the rest of the country.

Again, welcome, and I look forward to hearing from you.