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Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Subcommittee on Research & Technology Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (R-Va.)
A Review of the Networking and Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD) Program

Chairwoman Comstock: Good morning. I want to welcome everyone here today. The topic of this morning's hearing, A Review of the Networking and Information Technology Research and Development (NITRD) Program, is important to our national security, global competitiveness and technological innovation.

This hearing will provide us with an updated overview of the program, and it will discuss the recent President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology's (PCAST) report, on the NITRD program published in August 2015.

The Networking and Information Technology Research and Development program, or NITRD, was originally authorized in 1991 in the High Performance and Computing Act.

NITRD provides the primary mechanism by which the federal government coordinates this nation's almost 4 billion dollars of research and development on advanced information technologies in computing, networking, and software. Agencies who participate in the program include the Department of Homeland Security, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy.

Information technology is all around us in our day to day lives – on our smart phones, in our cars, and in our kitchens. It improves our way of life, even in ways that are not always as visible to us. As noted in the PCAST report, "information technology empowers scientific inquiry, space and Earth exploration, teaching and learning, consumer buying and selling, informed decision-making, national security, transportation, [and] advanced manufacturing."

R&D in information technology provides a greater understanding of how to protect essential systems and networks that support fundamental sectors of our economy, from emergency communications and power grids to air-traffic control networks and national defense systems. This kind of R&D works to prevent or minimize disruptions to critical information infrastructure, to protect public and private services, to detect and respond to threats while mitigating the severity of and assisting in the recovery from those threats, in an effort to support a more stable and secure nation.

As technology rapidly advances, the need for research and development continues to evolve. NITRD works to prevent duplicative and overlapping R&D efforts, thereby enabling more efficient use of government resources and taxpayer dollars.

Executive Order 13539 assigned the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) to periodically review the NITRD program. PCAST's most recent assessment, which was

published this past August, includes a number of recommendations. Those recommendations focus on eight specific R&D areas including, but not limited to: cybersecurity, IT and health, privacy, big data and data-intensive computing, and foundational computing research.

Considering the significant increase in global interconnectedness enabled by the Internet, and with it, increased cybersecurity attacks, I was glad to see that the PCAST report included recommendations of how to improve the foundations of our cybersecurity.

For example, one recommendation included in the report calls on the National Science Foundation to sponsor broad foundational research on methods to facilitate end-to-end construction of trustworthy systems, particularly for emerging application domains, and on ways to anticipate and defend against attacks.

I am excited for today's hearing, and I hope we are able to learn more about the current status of the NITRD program and how we can continue improving the program in order to promote continued technological leadership in the United States.

I am also looking forward to learning how industry is engaged in the NITRD program. As noted in the PCAST report, "today's advances rest on a strong base of research and development (R&D) created over many years of government and private investment. Because of these investments, the United States has a vibrant academia-industry-government ecosystem to support research and innovation in IT and to bring the results into practical use."

It is clear that focusing our investments on information technology research and development is important to our nation for a variety of reasons, including economic prosperity, national security, U.S. competitiveness, and quality of life. I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses on this important topic. Thank you for being here.

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