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Ranking Member Gerald E. Connolly
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation
Hearing on "How are Federal Agencies Harnessing Artificial Intelligence?"
September 14, 2023

Earlier this week, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer held his inaugural AI Insight Forum and Senator Hickenlooper held a hearing on "The Need for Transparency in Artificial Intelligence." And today, this House Subcommittee returns for a second hearing on AI to discuss its uses within our own federal government. It is clear all of Congress is interested in this technology.

This Subcommittee is also proud to continue its historical leadership role in the AI space. As many of you know, former Subcommittee Chairman, Will Hurd held a three-part hearing series on Artificial Intelligence, and the late former-Chairman, Elijah E. Cummings, focused more narrowly on facial recognition. And as Chairman in the 117th Congress I helped pass the AI Training Act (H.R.7683) and the AI in Counterterrorism Oversight Enhancement Act (H.R. 4469) out of committee with bipartisan support.

These initiatives show that if done right, the federal government can leverage AI to better serve the public. For example, several federal agencies are already using AI technologies to cut costs, improve constituents services, and strengthen existing systems. The United States Cyber Command and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), for example, employ AI technology to protect our networks and counter cyberattacks. The United States Postal Service (USPS) is currently piloting an autonomous vehicles project that employs AI technology. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) are using AI chatbots to facilitate communication with the public looking for help from the agency.

However, like all new tools, if used improperly, AI can result in unintended consequences. For example, automated systems can inadvertently perpetuate societal biases such as faulty facial recognition technology or opaque sentencing algorithms used by our criminal justice system. AI can also threaten jobs, proliferate misinformation, and raise privacy concerns.

That is why I applaud the Biden Administration for proactively taking significant steps to ensure transparency in the government's use of AI. Last October, the White House released its Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights to ensure the protection of our civil rights in the algorithmic age. Prior to that, the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act codified the establishment of the American AI Initiative and the National AI Advisory Committee. This Subcommittee looks forward to hearing an update from the panelists before us on their joint work with the Secretary of Commerce to advise the White House on AI policy.

Everyone can agree the government has a colossal responsibility of developing the necessary guardrails to curb the risks of this incredible technology. And these guardrails must strike the right balance among a host of competing and fundamental values: equity, efficiency, ethics, and the rule of law—just to name a few. But rules are only as successful as the oversight efforts that enforce them.

This committee must hold federal agencies accountable to ensure they are making appropriate choices about whether and when AI is right for their missions. For example, federal agencies must determine how they define AI, how to evaluate AI systems before procuring, establish guidance for its acquisition and create protocol for its usage.

The federal government must also intentionally train, recruit, and maintain a workforce that is comfortable and competent with this technology. That is why the Chairwoman and I worked to pass the AI Training Expansion Act of 2023 (H.R.4503) out of committee, which would expand AI training within the executive branch. We look forward to supporting future efforts that continue to support, bolster, and invest in our federal employees.

AI is already changing the world around us in many ways, and we need to step up to the challenge and mitigate the risks. The federal government must ensure this technology is created, deployed, and used in a safe, ethical, and equitable manner.

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