

Ranking Member Cantwell Opening Statement
NASA and NIST Nomination Hearing
Thursday, March 5, 2026
[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to both of our nominees for their willingness to serve.

Dr. Raman, you are nominated to be the Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology and to lead the National Institute for Standards and Technology. I think sometimes our colleagues don't fully understand how voluntary standards -- usually set by NIST -- are the essence of bringing people together so that we can move forward faster based on those standards. So, I look forward to hearing how you think that the research and standard setting at NIST help fuel the innovation that supports manufacturing, sets the gold standard for frameworks, best practices, [and] ensures the United States continues to lead in science and technology.

NIST has a critical role to play in setting those standards across technologies that will define American competitiveness for the next generation -- biotechnology, quantum computing, artificial intelligence -- and getting those standards right is about ensuring that American industry has clarity and confidence and that we play this role so that we can continue to dominate on standard-setting around the globe as well.

That is why Senator Young and I have introduced the bipartisan Future of AI Innovation Act to authorize NIST's Center for AI Standards and Innovation to develop those voluntary guidelines for AI and conduct rigorous testing that will ensure the United States leads AI for generations to come. And federal AI policy must ensure that these technologies meet the highest standards of trust, reliability and consumer safety.

I also introduced the National Quantum Initiative Reauthorization [Act] with Senator Young to keep the U.S. competitive in quantum science and technology...and helping develop a workforce. So, look forward to hearing your thoughts on that.

NIST is at the intersection of all those priorities. NIST also administers the bipartisan CHIPS and Science investment to promote enduring global leadership in semiconductors. This includes \$[11] billion for R&D to help reshore semiconductor manufacturing, train the semiconductor workforce, bridge the 'lab-to-fab' gap to accelerate innovation across the ecosystem, and semiconductor innovation is the foundation of who will win the future in AI and quantum computing and other critical technologies.

Unfortunately, the Department of Commerce, under Secretary Lutnick has, in my opinion, caused confusion and created needless uncertainty at NIST. Last year, the Secretary abruptly canceled [a] \$7.4 billion R&D investment in a nonprofit called Natcast under questionable circumstances. Natcast was charged with operating the National Semiconductor Technology Center, which Congress required by law to operate as a public-private consortium to better integrate R&D and workforce across the semiconductor ecosystem.

As of September 2025, Natcast had recruited more than 200 members across academia, industry, nonprofits to secure the future of R&D in the United States. In the wake of Secretary Lutnick's abrupt decision, NIST has provided few details on how they plan to achieve Congress's challenges in the CHIPS and Science Act. The NIST Director will need to change this lack of transparency immediately.

I'm also particularly concerned about the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program. Beginning in April...beginning in April of last year, NIST has been withholding funds for the centers across the United States. This MEP program has wide bipartisan support as a national network of go-to experts that help small and medium-sized manufacturers enhance productivity. So I will ask you about that. And in December 2025, I led a letter with 28 of my colleagues requesting straightforward answers on this failure to use these funds.

Finally, NIST has a broad science ecosystem [and has] long drawn strength from researchers and scientists. This is really important. There are troubling reports that NIST is reversing that long standard. I'd like to hear directly from you on how you intend to approach the participation of scientists at this agency.

So turning to you -- turning to our NASA nominee -- thank you for your willingness to serve. NASA's innovation and multiple sectors of input to our economy are critically important, but especially important for aerospace materials and manufacturing and safety. Nevertheless, last year, multiple NASA whistleblowers disclosed evidence to my office that are continuing to show the damages that are being done by OMB Director Vought, who is pushing NASA to implement dangerous cuts called for in the President's 2026 budget. OMB was doing so in disregard of the law, and I believe risked serious mission challenges for NASA on safety and workforce.

In January, Congress rejected these draconian cuts on a bipartisan basis, passing a spending bill that stabilized NASA's funding for the year. And yesterday, this Commerce Committee passed our bipartisan NASA Authorization Act of 2026, which authorizes \$25.3 billion for fiscal year 2027 -- a 2.5 percent increase over the previous year. So NASA's 2025 Aerospace Safety [Advisory] Panel [Report] reported...the damage caused by OMB...implementing a wave of NASA workforce reductions and loss of expertise, particularly in areas of safety of major programs such as the Artemis program. So I will want to ask you about that. It's simply unacceptable, in my mind, to compromise these safety issues.

So if confirmed, will you stand up for NASA's workforce, to be an advocate for NASA, and fully develop and implement the laws as Congress directed? NASA and NIST are both vital to America's science research and innovation, and the Trump administration has been undermining that science research. Last year, over 10,000 STEM PhDs were lost from the federal workforce, and this is incredibly important for us to keep our competitiveness around the globe. So thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to hearing from our nominees.

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Sen. Cantwell: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I'm going to start on the NASA side. Mr. Anderson, there is a major race going on for the United States to continue to compete in next-generation aerospace technology. Part of NASA's leadership is in a high-rate composite aircraft manufacturing project that develops advanced composites and makes sure that we have lighter, more fuel-efficient planes, ensuring next-generation competitiveness. This is something my colleagues from Idaho and I have worked on. It's an ambitious goal, but it certainly is something that NASA and space also depend on too, because we have to become more fuel-efficient all the time. So, will you support this HiCAM program at NASA and support competitive technologies like the Advanced Aerospace Materials Manufacturing Tech Hub?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, Senator.

Sen. Cantwell: Great. I appreciate Administrator Isaacman's support for...competition for two lunar landers. If confirmed, will you support this competition and award process to... whichever, you know, providers win the competition?

Anderson: Yes, Senator.

Sen. Cantwell: Great. Once we return to the moon, and I'm assuming you agree with the legislation that we just passed out here yesterday, that we have to go faster. How can this Committee help to achieve those 2028 landings?

Anderson: Senator, thanks for that question. And I think you alluded to what I was exactly going to say. I think what we're looking at right now is a perfect alignment between the Administration, this Committee -- demonstrated from what happened yesterday, by unanimous consent, bipartisan consent -- for NASA. We have a challenger, a geopolitical rival in China, that requires cooperation between all whole-of-government parts, and it supports the President's National Space Policy, and I look forward to joining the Administrator and helping this Committee pursue those goals.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. Turning to you, Dr. Raman. I said in my opening comment about NIST and standard setting, it really is an accelerant. Isn't that correct?

Dr. Raman: Yes.

Sen. Cantwell: I think sometimes we get into disputes here because somebody thinks that we're setting regulations. When in reality, the most important aspect of NIST is the standard setting that allows -- whatever, it could have been electricity, it could have been anything -- but it's the standard-setting that helps accelerate the competitiveness of our nation. Is that...?

Raman: Senator, I'd like to just point out again, the standard setting is, of course, a key goal for NIST. And I just like to, I mean, I agree it's extremely important for America to lead in tech standard setting that ensures, of course, like I said, you know, expanded markets for our technologies, but also that American values are what underpin international commerce.

Sen. Cantwell: Yeah, well, I'm not sure everybody in the Administration agrees on that, so I hope that you can be a loud voice for this, because this is critically important. And again, I think people hear the word standards, and then all of a sudden they're like, 'oh, this is a regulation,' when in reality, you are talking about a voluntary process to accelerate our competitiveness by getting industry something they couldn't necessarily do. Obviously, there's a lot of competition in industry, and they would compete with each other and like their standard to win. But you play the middle guy who basically says, 'no, let's all come together with a common standard, and then we will go faster.' So you will play that role within NIST?

Raman: Yes, I will.

Sen. Cantwell: Proudly play that role?

Ramen: Yes, I will.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, so now let's get to -- because I'm sure this won't be the last of this debate as it relates to standards -- because somebody is going to, again, claim that this is some sort of regulatory process. Will you support the Manufacturing Extension Programs that are in law and under NIST?

Raman: Senator, thank you for that question. I am fully committed to this Administration's priorities to reindustrialize America, bring manufacturing back. You know, just as you've been very supportive of this, Senator. At Purdue, we've done a lot within our state of Indiana for this as well. It's the state with the highest concentration of manufacturing jobs, and so this is very near and dear to us. That being said, I am aware that there have been some IG concerns regarding the, you know, Extension Program.

Sen. Cantwell: I got one more question, and I only have a few seconds left, but just tell me, do you support the Manufacturing Extension Program?

Raman: Senator, I don't know. I mean, I don't know the specifics of, you know, your comments earlier about, you know, what has happened? What has not happened? But I'm... supportive of manufacturing.

Sen. Cantwell: You think it's a good idea to have a program at NIST -- that you'll be in charge of -- that is called Manufacturing Extension?

Raman: I mean, I'm very supportive of whatever we can do to make sure advanced manufacturing moves ahead here in America in whatever way possible. I just don't know the specifics...

Sen. Cantwell: We'll have to get a crisper answer for the record from you. Okay, what about NIST telling us what the -- if confirmed, will you commit to determining the impact of the agency's policy on CHIPS and Science and giving us a full accounting of how we're going to meet the goals of the CHIPS and Science Act that you're responsible for?

Raman: Thank you for that question, Senator. Again, as I said in my remarks, the entire AI tech stack, advancing America's leadership in chips, both in manufacturing and at the critical edge of next-generation chips, will be a high priority for us, and I intend to work with this Committee and Congress to make sure whatever resources you provide that we use it most effectively to make that happen.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, so we'll ask for -- this is like an accounting -- because we're not getting that out of the current Administration. And then the last point is just on this equity stipulation as part of this broad agency announcement that stipulates that applicants may be required to issue the Department equity warrants, licenses to the intellectual property, royalty and revenue sharing?

Raman: Again, Senator, I don't know the details, the specifics of this.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, so read a little more about -- read a little bit more about that, and give us an answer. So we're looking -- again -- you're going to head this organization. We want to hear your views about those policies, because they're pretty big policies. We think the agency is making some pretty big mistakes. We want to know what your philosophy is. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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