Testimony of Arati Prabhakar
Nominee to be Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy
Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

July 20, 2022

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). I am very happy to have my husband and our two daughters here with me today. They are my north star, and I want to thank them for their love and support.

I want to thank this Committee and each of you for your work to bolster U.S. science and technology so it can create a better future for all Americans. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you in this important pursuit.

I come to you with a perspective shaped by science, technology, and innovation experience in both the public and the private sector. My first job after earning a PhD—and my introduction to public service—was as a Fellow at Congress' Office of Technology Assessment.

I later had the privilege of leading two wonderful and very different federal R&D organizations. In the mid-1990s, I served as Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the Department of Commerce, a role for which I was fortunate to receive unanimous confirmation by this Committee and the full Senate. In my time leading NIST, we expanded what is now known as the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership, which boosts the competitiveness of small and medium-sized manufacturers in all 50 states, and the Advanced Technology Program, which stimulated early-stage advanced technology development. We also significantly strengthened NIST's measurement and standards laboratories. From 2012 to 2017, I served as the Director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), where I had previously managed advanced microelectronics programs and started a new semiconductor office. While I was Director, DARPA ran hundreds of R&D programs that drew from fields as diverse as space science and anthropology, cyber-physical systems engineering and biology, electromagnetics and advanced math. Their impact on America's security is already tangible today in revolutionary military capabilities, platforms to combat infectious disease, and protection against terror threats.

In between NIST and DARPA, I worked for 15 years in the commercial technology sector, first in a couple of companies and then for a decade as an early-stage venture capitalist. I was later a Fellow at Stanford University's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS). Most recently, I co-founded Actuate, a nonprofit organization that focuses on new approaches to innovation for some of the most critical challenges of this century.

The thread that runs through these four decades is an aspiration to improve how the future unfolds. This idea was instilled in me by a mother who brought our family here from India in the

early 1960s, when I was just three years old. It was nurtured by a professor at Texas Tech University who called a roomful of freshmen to use engineering to create value for our world.

And it was reinforced throughout my career as I worked on challenging goals with researchers, entrepreneurs, and executives at many universities, major defense contractors, large commercial companies, a variety of startups, nonprofit labs, and government labs and agencies. As I learned about the possibilities, constraints, and ethos of the many actors in America's rich and complex R&D community, I came to understand what it takes to achieve impact, and how to do together what we cannot do separately.

For many decades, American science and technology has been the most powerful engine for innovation in history—an achievement that did not happen by accident. In this era, President Biden has named the greatest challenges we face: geopolitical and economic competition, pandemics and other health problems, unequal opportunity and inequity for many Americans, the climate crisis, and the erosion of privacy and trust. Meeting these challenges demands a new generation of bold exploration and creative experimentation. Science and technology leadership is essential for our country to flourish in the years ahead. And OSTP is at the heart of making sure that U.S. leadership endures in this complex century.

OSTP's success depends on its excellent staff being able to work effectively with each other and many others in a respectful and energized environment. Press reports about the organization earlier this year were extremely concerning. Based on limited interactions with OSTP staff for this confirmation process, my impression is that Dr. Alondra Nelson and the OSTP staff have set the foundation for a respectful workplace where many people are working with excitement on their important efforts.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, people will be my first priority. I look forward to the opportunity to nurture an environment where people wake up each morning eager to deliver on a mission that matters.

Thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you today, and I welcome your thoughts and questions. If confirmed, I will be deeply honored to serve our country as the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.