Eric S. Lander Opening Remarks
Commerce Committee, April 29, 2021

Thank you, Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker. And, thank you to Senators Warren and Markey for your kind introductions.

It's a great honor to come before this committee as President Biden's nominee for Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

America has led the world in science and technology for 75 years. That leadership has had profound benefits for our health, economy, and national security — driving medical breakthroughs from cancer to covid; new industries with millions of jobs, from computers to biotechnology.

But, today, America's future depends on science and technology like never before. We see amazing opportunities ahead, but also unprecedented challenges. The choices we make now will determine our path for the generations to come.

In a recent letter, President Biden recognized we need to rethink our strategy for the next 75 years.

He asked OSTP to take the lead, because OSTP is the one place where all of science and technology comes together — across government, industry, academia, medicine, and society.

President Biden posed big questions:

- What lessons can we learn from the pandemic?
- How do we ensure America is the world leader in the technologies of the future, especially in competition with China?
- How can science create market-driven solutions for climate change?
- And, very importantly: How do we ensure the fruits of science and technology are shared across all America and all Americans?

If confirmed, I'd throw my full energies into this work. Let me explain why.

I grew up as a kid in Brooklyn, New York. I was raised by my mom, because my dad suffered from a long illness and died when I was 11.

In my neighborhood, there were no scientists.

If New York City hadn't had a few public STEM high schools, there's no way I'd ever have become a scientist.

I knew I was very lucky to have that chance. And, I've never forgotten it.

Most people never get a chance. And, the opportunity is so unevenly distributed across gender, race, and geography.

Science has been unwelcoming to women and people of color. It's concentrated in a few regions of the country. Most Americans lack access to great STEM schools or many even to broadband.

Lack of inclusion is not only deeply unfair, it's a greatest risk to America's success. To lead the world, we're going to need everyone.

If confirmed to OSTP, I will — as I've done in my career at the Broad Institute — make full inclusion and equitable outcomes a high priority, including that:

• OSTP's staff will look like America, including identifying extraordinary women and people of color as candidates in every search;

• PCAST will be the most diverse in history;

• OSTP's work will be rooted in equity — tackling issues from STEM inclusion to algorithmic bias.

• And, I'd work to put in place a plan to increase the numbers of women and underrepresented people in the science and technology professions by 50%. We can do that.

I'm also excited to bring other experiences and values:

I've seen how science can be a force for justice.

As a young scientist in 1989, I testified in one of the first criminal cases using DNA fingerprinting. For such consequential evidence, the quality was shoddy. I said so. That position wasn't popular with everyone.

But the case forced high standards for DNA fingerprinting and led directly to the founding of the Innocence Project, which has used DNA to reveal that hundreds of innocent people were behind bars — with Black Americans making up a disproportionate share and having served much longer sentences.

A year later, I got to be part of an amazing collaboration: the Human Genome Project.

When we set out in 1990, mapping a person's complete genetic code seemed absurd: it would have taken 200 years. But scientists rallied together and drove innovation. We got it done in just 13 years. Today, it takes just hours.

It's unlocked secrets from cancer to Alzheimer's, driving unimaginable progress.

After the genome project, I worked to found a new kind of research community, the Broad Institute.

It's deeply collaborative.

It lets scientists — particularly young scientists — take on challenges at whatever scale is needed, blending the best of individual creativity and large-scale platforms.

I'm particularly proud it's one of the few such institutions in which women comprise the majority of the overall staff, scientific staff, and senior leadership team.

There's a lot more to be done, but we can reimagine how we do science.

Finally, I've learned that good science requires a healthy dose of humility.

Scientists' favorite ideas are often wrong, mine included. We constantly need to be open to different perspectives — from scientists, non-scientists, policymakers.

This committee has led on so many critical issues in science and technology. Your work has been so collaborative and so bipartisan.

If confirmed, I promise to work closely and open-mindedly with each of you.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.