Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Hearing Titled: Winning the AI Race: Strengthening U.S. Capabilities in Computing and Innovation

May 8th, 2025

Senator Cantwell Q&A

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to continue that same theme, generally about competitiveness. Do we need NIST [to support development of] standards -- just yes or no, just go down the line?

Altman: I don't think we need it. It can be helpful.

Su: Yes.

Intrator: Yes.

Smith: Yes.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, so in the context of what we're talking about here, we're really just talking -- I don't know, Mr. Smith or Mr. Intrator, or Dr. Su. The issue here is, if we want to move fast, we want to create -- just like [we do] with electricity -- the standards by which we want to move fast. Here, I would just call it 'code for code' is what we want, right? We want NIST to do something in the standard setting that will allow us to move much faster. Is that right either Mr. Smith or Mr. Intrator?

Smith: What I would say is this, first of all, NIST is where standards go to be adopted, but it's not necessarily where they first try to be created. So, we've got --

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you for that clarity. We're talking about industry, IEEE, lots of different organizations, [with] industry input, and then they're adopted. So yes, let's clarify that. Let's clarify.

Smith: I think that's the way it works.

Sen. Cantwell: Yes, and but you think we need to do that, particularly if the United States wants to lead?

Smith: We will need industry standards. We will need American adoption of standards. And you are right, we will need US efforts to really ensure that the world buys into these standards.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, Mr. Intrator?

Intrator: I think it's important that when you're working with standards, what that allows for is a common vocabulary, which allows for acceleration. And so, to the extent that we can step into that role and establish touch points where everyone can agree on specific things, that will lead to an acceleration, both domestically and abroad.

Sen. Cantwell: And I don't know if drilling down more on what you think those are, but in general, when I think about the internet and HTTP or HTML or…TCP/IP, we're talking about things that allowed us to move faster, and getting those standards established helped us do that.

On the export issue, Mr. Intrator, the issue of cloud sources shouldn't be left out. If we say, let's go with Malaysia, Malaysia is going to tell us that they can certify that there is no diversion of these chips to China, and we basically have a way that we can make sure that that this is understood and monitored. Then we also want access, right? We want access by U.S. companies?

Intrator: Yeah, I think Lisa's point was excellent, right? At the end of the day, the world wants to be able to build and deploy artificial intelligence in a very broad way. And if we -- nature abhors a vacuum, if we do not step into that role, other technology will step in that role. If it is sub-optimal, so be it. It's better to have something that is sub-optimal than have nothing. And so that is what—

Sen. Cantwell: Well, we don't want a recurrence of a Huawei that develops faster and then has a government back door, and then we all have to raise opposition. I'm for a Tech NATO. I'm for the five most sophisticated democracies and tech nations setting the rules of the road and saying, "This is who you should buy from. Don't buy from anybody else who has a government back door. Not a good idea."

So that's how we get leverage. I'm not so hot on the President's tariff agenda for this very reason because we're not building the alliances, we're creating the enemies. And what I want to do is get the supply chain here, get the semiconductor flow here, lower the cost, and go as fast as we can.

Intrator: Yeah, I agree with that. I don't think that that's -- I don't think anybody's not going to agree with that, right? I think that's an excellent objective. I just think that what will happen beyond the five NATO companies is that there will be a demand for artificial intelligence, and they will proceed with what they can proceed with.

Sen. Cantwell: Dr. Su, what is your view of this, about how we win, how we protect our objectives, but we're more aggressive on the on the export strategy?

Su: Well, I think there is a clear recognition that we need an export strategy. And so having this conversation is very important. And from our perspective, the idea is to ensure that our allies, and frankly, I use allies in the very broadest sense, get access to the great American technology that we have with the appropriate controls in place. And I think you can do both. To your earlier comment, Ranking Member Cantwell, about the need to have US technologies in those countries, I think those countries are actually very interested in doing that because we do have the best technology today, and using that to really build this broad AI ecosystem is really our opportunity.

Sen. Cantwell: I agree. Thank you so much.