

Rise of the Machines: Artificial Intelligence and its Growing Impact on U.S. Policy

On Sept. 25, House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Information Technology Chairman Will Hurd (R-TX) and Ranking Member Robin Kelly (D-IL) released a white paper on the intersection of public policy and artificial intelligence (AI). The white paper, entitled “**Rise of the Machines: Artificial Intelligence and its Growing Impact on U.S. Policy**,” follows a series of hearings the subcommittee began holding in February 2018 in which various experts, academics and industry leaders testified about the future of the technology.

Throughout the course of the hearings, a number of points became apparent to the subcommittee:

1. AI technology remains relatively new.
2. For better or worse, the U.S. workforce is impacted by AI.
3. Regardless of intent, AI requires collecting vast amounts of data, posing threats to privacy.
4. AI has the ability to disrupt the U.S. economy and societal norms.

The subcommittee concludes that, given the information collected from expert witness testimony, it is vital the federal government take additional steps to maintain the United States’ advantage in the technological space. In pursuit of this, the white paper outlines a number of priorities lawmakers should include in any upcoming policy proposals.

Ensuring Public Safety

The subcommittee recommends the federal government review the existing regulatory regime and determine its capability of addressing the risks to public safety posed by AI. If the current framework is deemed inadequate, the subcommittee urges Congress and the administration to craft policies that will ensure public safety, while avoiding the micromanagement of its evolution. The subcommittee specifically suggests the federal government aim to establish a minimum standard upon which AI safety and security can be evaluated.

Spurring Innovation

Even without enacting legislation or issuing regulations, the federal government has the resources to incentivize innovation in the AI arena.

To this end, the subcommittee recommends lawmakers pass the OPEN Government Data Act (OGDA) (H.R.1770/S.2852), which would require federal agencies to make their data sets available for public use. Easily accessible data sets, the subcommittee posits, would increase research and experimentation, advancing the rate of technological improvement.

The subcommittee also recommends the federal government pursue innovation through competition.

Inspired by other challenges supported by the federal government, the subcommittee recognizes the value that can originate from competitive environments. As evidenced by previous competitions, such challenges can lead to creative and collaborative solutions that may not have otherwise occurred.

Investing in Research & Development

A common critique among the expert witnesses was that the federal government was falling short in its funding for AI research and development. Although the subcommittee acknowledges the tremendous effort by universities and private sector entities, it highlights the lacking investment provided from the federal government to various agencies. In light of this, the subcommittee recommends lawmakers steadily increase research and development funding for, among others, the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Department of Defense, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The white paper comes amidst congressional and administrative efforts to focus policy priorities concerning AI. There have been six congressional hearings on AI held by various committees, yet lawmakers continue to grapple with the implications of automated vehicles, the use of algorithms to filter social media content, and AI on the battlefield. While other countries have taken steps to establish national AI strategies, the white paper calls on the U.S. to do the same, emphasizing the importance of providing guidance as AI continues to evolve.

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