

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Mark DeSaulnier (CA-10)

Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions

"Building an AI-Ready America: Adopting AI at Work"

Tuesday, February 3, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I must say, I could have written that opening statement by you myself, so this is a good sign.

I think it's important for this Subcommittee, and this Committee in particular, because so much of the jurisdiction is here. I am reminded, as a member of the Bay Area – the fifth-wealthiest district in the United States, with a lot of investors in it – [that] a friend of mine, who was an early equity investor in social media, called me a year or so ago and said: "they're doing the same thing they did with social media." Meaning [that] private equity investors [are] getting investment, but the primary drive is to get *return* on investment. Which is nothing against investors. It's just that we have to have it proportionate.

Historically, the American workforce has not proportionally benefited from new technology. So, we have to make sure – and I'm really encouraged by your comments, Mr. Chairman – that we approach it that way. And this Committee, and Congress, are responsible for this.

I will say as a former chair of the Senate Labor Committee in California, I worked closely with the California Labor Fed, that's working closely with responsible investors to make sure we get it right. And again, as a member from the San Francisco Bay Area, where a lot of this is happening, we want to make sure we get it right. And also, with three national laboratories and research facilities, both public and private, it's important that all of that is done the right way, so we don't repeat the mistakes when it comes to technology that history has taught us that we should avoid, with all the benefits from technology.

So, I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and I want to thank the Chair.

Artificial intelligence, or AI, has rapidly been introduced into Americans' lives. While some uses of this technology in the workplace show promise, it also poses significant dangers.

Concerns about this new technology are not without merit. Some employers have used AI as a weapon in retaliation against workers who are trying to unionize or to suppress wages. The unrestricted use of AI can also infringe on workers' privacy. AI risks making it harder for workers to prove it when their gender, race, age, or disability status are used to discriminate against them.

As AI proliferates, we've begun to see employers – not all employers, but some – use sophisticated automated technology to monitor and evaluate workers. This can lead to efficiencies, but we have got to balance here with workers' privacy rights. This includes tracking workers' on-the-job physical activity, such as bathroom breaks, using facial recognition to assess their attention to computer screens, and other tasks. That's pretty amazing, I

think we'd all be concerned about that. We don't want to be monitored in this way, or at least we want guardrails, and have the best available knowledge to do no harm.

In some cases, AI has the potential to make workers', consumers', and investors' lives easier and better. But without worker input, artificial intelligence could exacerbate the ever-widening power gap between workers and employers. AI should be used in the workplace to help workers do their jobs with ease and efficiency, not encroach on their privacy and pad the company's bottom line at the workers' expense.

To strike the right balance, it is imperative that workers and their representatives have a seat at the table in the development and implementation of AI in America's workplaces. And it is the role of local, state, and federal governments to implement safeguards to prevent employer abuses and create this healthy balance.

Congress has a responsibility to rein in big tech companies who take advantage of this prosperity and potential benefits so that AI can be used for everybody - *for* workers instead of *against* them. We don't need another tool that will funnel profits to the ultra-wealthy at the expense of working Americans. Congress must take an active role in shaping how AI is integrated into our lives and in developing thoughtful regulations that balance protecting workers with fostering economic growth.

I will leave you all with a quote from a wonderful book that I have recently reread: *The AI Con* by Alex Hanna and Emily Bender. The authors warn that AI companies are selling consumers an attractive bill of goods and that [quote] "a few major well-placed players are poised to accumulate significant wealth by extracting value from other people's creative work, personal data, or labor, and replacing quality services with artificial facsimiles." [end quote]

We have a responsibility, and again, I want to thank my colleague and our Chair for setting the tone of this hearing. It's a balance. And I think we want to come to the table with the AI community, with investors, and make sure we strike this balance the right way, so everyone can benefit from this and no one gets taken advantage of [by] it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.