

Opening Statement

**Chairman Bart Gordon (D-TN)**  
**Committee on Science and Technology**

**Full Committee Hearing: *Competitiveness and Innovation on the  
Committee's 50th Anniversary with Bill Gates, Chairman of  
Microsoft***

March 12, 2008

In November of 1957, as a young boy, I remember looking into the sky and seeing the blinking red dot pass overhead that struck fear into countless Americans. The launch of *Sputnik* and the beginning of the "space race" began a period of unprecedented investment in research and math and science education in this country, resulting in the development of new technologies and the advancement of innovation.

During the next 50 years, the United States became a world leader in science and technology, education and research, and - most importantly - innovation. These efforts fueled our economy and allowed each generation of Americans to inherit a better standard of living than their parents.

As the father of a seven-year-old daughter, I fear that our children will be the first generation of Americans that do not inherit a standard of living better than their parents. And let me tell you why.

*Sputnik* showed us that we were not the world's technological leader. Today, with the rapid economic and technological advances of other countries, I fear we are now on the cusp of another *Sputnik* moment. I fear that our country has "coasted" on the investments we made 50 years ago.

Now is the time to act and I believe this Committee has an important role to play in helping bring our country back as the technological leader in the world.

Soon after the launch of *Sputnik*, in March of 1958, this Committee was established to face the challenges presented by the Space Age. Though the threat is different, the challenges today remain the same – to secure our country's international dominance in the areas of innovation and technology development.

The witness before us today needs little introduction. Bill Gates embodies both the American spirit of innovation and the theological virtue of charity. He has built arguably the most successful technology company in the world and then has turned his financial success into his gift to our society.

On this occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this Committee, as we reflect back on the technological advances of the past and look ahead to the challenges facing our country's competitiveness in the world, I can think of no other witness better suited and well positioned to help share insights with this Committee.

As I have said before, I am proud of the work done by this Committee over the past year to develop and shepherd through Congress the America COMPETES Act. This legislation was a necessary and important first step in making the commitments needed to bring our country back to technological prominence. And though COMPETES was a great success, our work is far from done.

I look forward to hearing from Mr. Gates on other efforts needed to rebuild our strength and again lead the world for another 50 years. It is my hope that we will continue to look for ways to embrace the global marketplace and not shy away from the challenges we face.

Before I conclude, I wanted to quickly acknowledge the presence of two former Members of the House and past Chairmen of this Committee – Bob Walker and Sherry Boehlert. I am pleased that you were both able to join us today and help us commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Committee.