



Committee: House Science, Space & Technology Subcommittee on Research & Technology
Event: [Robots Made in America: Advancing U.S. Leadership in Manufacturing and Automation](#)
Date: April 21, 2026

Executive Summary:

On April 21, 2026, the House Science, Space & Technology Subcommittee on Research & Technology held a hearing to examine ways to advance U.S. leadership in robotics and manufacturing with a focus on strengthening domestic innovation and reducing supply chain reliance on China.

- Republican Members emphasized the importance of protecting national security and maintaining manufacturing competitiveness through a renewed emphasis on decreasing reliance on foreign supply chains.
- Democratic lawmakers focused on expanding workforce development efforts via technical assistance programs, small business incentives to adopt automation, and progressive safety standards.
- Members and witnesses highlighted the need for a federal regulatory body to coordinate a national robotics strategy.

Member Toplines:

[Subcommittee Chair Jay Obernolte \(R-CA-23\)](#): Obernolte emphasized the importance of integrating AI into robotic systems. He urged quick action to leverage emerging technologies, arguing that a national robotics strategy was necessary to strengthen American manufacturing and address increasing labor shortages. Obernolte pointed to his National Commission on Robotics Act ([H.R. 7334](#)) as a way to assess U.S. competitiveness and develop forward-thinking policy. He also underscored the importance of federal institutions such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in supporting research and development.

[Subcommittee Ranking Member Haley Stevens \(D-MI-11\)](#): Stevens voiced concern that China has become the global leader in the manufacturing and export of industrial robotics, and controls much of the world's robotics supply chain. She argued that the U.S. lacks sufficient domestic production capacity and relies too heavily on Chinese-made parts. She also highlighted that small- and mid-sized manufacturers face funding and educational barriers to adopting advanced robotics. Stevens criticized recent policy decisions, including tariffs and proposed cuts to the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), and called for a coordinated response that keeps workers central to technological adoption and ensures robotics enhances rather than replaces jobs.

[Full Committee Chair Brian Babin \(R-TX-36\)](#): Babin argued that the convergence of AI and robotics creates significant economic opportunities and intensified strategic competition, particularly with China's large-scale investments and coordinated national focus on robotics. He highlighted the role of Congress in understanding and addressing supply chain vulnerabilities, as well as gaps in research and workforce development. Babin underscored the importance for safety standards development and workforce training as advanced robots move from factories into less controlled environments, as well as continued research and academic partnerships to prepare the next generation of workers.

[Full Committee Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren \(D-CA-18\)](#): Lofgren asserted that U.S. policy had disproportionately focused on software while neglecting the hardware and integrated systems needed for full robotics development. She argued that the absence of a national strategy, along with the discontinuation of initiatives like the National Robotics Institute, had allowed China to pull ahead with a more comprehensive investment strategy. Lofgren emphasized that reclaiming U.S. leadership would require sustained investment in robotics systems and integrated systems hardware, and she advocated for stronger safety standards for robotics in domestic settings as well as a significant increase in federally supported robotics data.

Witness Toplines:

[Evan Beard, CEO, Standard Bots](#): Beard stated that robots are capable of revitalizing U.S. manufacturing, expanding competitiveness, and driving broad economic growth. He contended that U.S. manufacturing's disadvantage against China is not only due to lower foreign labor costs, but also national investment and rapid deployment of robotics. Beard claimed that this gap posed not only economic, but also national security concerns. He outlined a plan for domestic investments in robotics, workforce training and development, as well as government protection against foreign market manipulation.

[Jeff Burnstein, President, A3 Association for Advancing Automation](#): Burnstein contended that the emergence of physical AI created a renewed opportunity for U.S. robotics leadership, but only if paired with aggressive adoption and workforce development to address manufacturing labor shortages. Burnstein emphasized that robots were essential to satisfying labor demand and improving industrial competitiveness. He outlined a national robotics strategy that included coordinated federal leadership, tax incentives and government-led adoption, federally-funded workforce training, increased research investment, and stronger standards development.

[Michael Robbins, CEO, Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International \(AUVSI\)](#): Robbins argued that despite continued American strength in software, China's large-scale state investment, aggressive manufacturing expansion, and control of global robotics markets are enabling the nation to rapidly outpace the U.S. Robbins emphasized that this gap posed economic and serious national security vulnerabilities, given the potential for robotic systems to enable surveillance or even physical harm. He called for a comprehensive national robotics strategy focused on coordinated industrial policy, supply chain resilience, faster domestic adoption, and stronger security restrictions on foreign-linked systems.

[Susan Helper, Carlton Professor of Economics, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University](#): Helper explained that while robotics could help address the U.S.'s manufacturing workforce shortage and declining competitiveness, the outcomes would depend heavily on how the technology was deployed. She argued that automation delivers the strongest gains when it is designed to augment workers rather than replace them outright. Helper called for implementation processes that involve engineers, managers, and workers from the outset, along with workforce-friendly policies that drive wage and job growth.

Major Takeaways:

Federal Commission and National Standards:

- Obernolte expressed frustration that the U.S. lacks a dedicated federal commission on robotics like many of its international counterparts.
 - Burnstein explained that a federal robotics commission would enable the coordination necessary to develop an effective national strategy.
 - Beard called for the MEP program to be reformed and supported incentivizing American-made robots to address labor shortages, framing robotic automation as the “power tool of the 21st century.”
- Rep. **Jim Baird** (R-IN-04) highlighted the growing importance of robotics and autonomous equipment in precision agriculture as a way to improve efficiency, but expressed concern that much of this equipment is foreign-made.
 - Robbins called for a national robotics strategy that includes incentives for the adoption of American-made technologies.
- Rep. **Rick McCormick** (R-GA-07) questioned how Congress can prevent overregulating and slowing down American innovation.
 - Burnstein advocated for the prioritization of safety and the development of a national robot safety standard to ensure that robots are truly safe outside of traditional industrial settings.
- Rep. **Bill Foster** (D-IL-11) argued that while agencies like NIST set cybersecurity standards, the U.S. lacks an authoritative body to evaluate specific products and determine whether they are secure for public use. He suggested creating a designated agency to evaluate cybersecurity issues.

Domestic Manufacturing:

- Stevens raised alarms about China’s state-backed industrial strategy and asked how Congress can close modern financing gaps to promote investment in robotics integration and strengthen the domestic supply chain.
 - Helper and Burnstein suggested that government procurement to stabilize demand may incentivize small manufacturers to adopt robotic automation.
- Rep. **Luz Rivas** (D-CA-29) questioned how Trump administration funding cuts for programs essential for manufacturing infrastructure and the development of the next generation of the robotics workforce, such as NIST, NSF, and the Department of Education, would impact America’s robotics future.
 - Helper encouraged Congress to promote hands-on training through reducing barriers to programs like apprenticeships.

- Rep. **April McClain Delaney** (D-MD-06) highlighted research showing that very few manufacturers currently use robotics and argued that stronger standards and technical assistance are needed to accelerate adoption. She also emphasized the importance of secure supply chains and coordination with allies to prevent surveillance risks.

Foreign Supply Chains:

- Babin expressed concern at how dependent the U.S. robotics industry is on foreign-sourced components and asked if there are any specific supply chain vulnerabilities that Congress should be focusing on.
 - Burnstein and Robbins agreed that the U.S. is very dependent on foreign sources of rare earth metals, and called for a coordinated response of restricting the export of U.S. technologies to adversarial nations and domestic incentives to foster adoption of automation to spur domestic manufacturing.
- Babin questioned if China is following its pattern of subsidizing domestic industries, flooding global markets, and undercutting competitors on prices to the field of robotics.
 - Robbins and Beard supported the complete banning of Chinese robots and the progressive weaning off of foreign supply chains.
 - Burnstein and Helper supported the expansion of U.S. supply chains, but warned of the consequences of damaging relationships with countries that offer materials that the U.S. is so dependent on.
- McCormick asked what specific guardrails should be implemented to block adversary-owned technologies, while ensuring that innovation can still be fostered without those same components.
 - Robbins advocated for the American Security Robotics Act ([H.R. 8189](#)) and supported the banning of any system that the U.S. has as a Chinese military company or does business with the People's Liberation Army.
- Stevens emphasized the importance of U.S. collaboration with allied nations.
 - Robbins encouraged the U.S. to counter coordinated authoritarian challenges by working closely with democratic allies.

Wartime Capabilities of Robots:

- Rep. **Sheri Biggs** (R-SC-03) urged the U.S. to counter China's approach of heavy state investment and strategic industrial policy for both industrial and battlefield applications.
- Biggs asked if an investigation into the national security risk posed by foreign robotics manufacturers was warranted.
 - Robbins answered that such an investigation would be appropriate, while Burnstein and Robbins warned that an investigation could potentially damage relationships with countries with important supply chains.
- Rep. **David Rouzer** (R-NC-07) asked if there is any coordination between the Department of Defense and others in the national security sector in terms of using robotics.
 - Robbins noted that while the U.S. is still in the early stages of integrating robotics and autonomous systems into military applications, the war in Ukraine has prompted increased coordination and training efforts for the future.