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Written Testimony of Representative Gerry Connolly (VA-11)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 4: "Making It" Across the Economy

Good afternoon, Whip Hoyer, and my colleagues. I want to thank you for hosting this hearing as we begin to outline the next chapter of the successful Make It in America agenda. I am proud to be a partner in this effort.

Thanks to your leadership, Mr. Hoyer, it is House Democrats who are advancing strategies to help employers grow their operations and create jobs. And we have had some notable successes, including the reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act, the small business Innovation Research and Technology Transfer programs, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

We also worked collaboratively on the last reauthorizations for the Export Import Bank and federal transportation programs, both of which are now overdue for renewal. As we consider, "what's next," for the Make It in America agenda, I suggest those two programs, which are vital to delivering American products across the country and the globe, should be atop our list.

Beyond that, we need an agenda focused on economic growth, not economic grievance. Right now, neither party is focused on what could be called the "suburban office economy" voter – the middle class Americans who work for businesses in which their own economic success is linked to that of their employer. An anti-business message won't win them over, and, in fact, it might even drive them away.

Congress has not been speaking to these individuals for some time now, and that must change.

We need an agenda that focuses on growing the high tech economy and creating clean energy jobs.

We need an agenda that assumes a global economy in which we all benefit from the free flow of goods and services.

We need an agenda that invests in our future – education, R&D, and job training.

And we need a reform agenda that rebuilds trust in government's ability to get things done and operate efficiently.

You only have to look across the Potomac to the community I represent in Northern Virginia to see the success of this approach.

We partnered with our business community to invest in a world-class school system to develop the highly skilled workforce they need to succeed in a global information economy.

We promoted a competitive tax code, and fostered not only new small business development but also international business opportunities.

We also made strategic investments in transportation -- like Metro's new Silver Line -- that served as a magnet for employers.

Today, Northern Virginia is home to a technology community rivaling that of Silicon Valley.

Those were not exactly radical ideas. In fact, they are the kinds of things that used to enjoy bipartisan support in Congress -- when responsible governing was the norm rather than the exception.

During my years in local government, we liked to say that we didn't belong to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party but to the Party of Getting Things Done. That's what people expect of their elected leaders.

Great countries achieve their success by making robust, sustainable investments in the three-legged stool of education, R&D, and infrastructure. Right now, America is disinvesting in all three! Meanwhile, our competitors -- China, India, and others -- are barreling ahead.

In 1960, we spent more than 3% of our GDP on infrastructure projects like the Interstate Highway. Today, we spend less than 1% of our GDP on these vital investments. It was just last month that the House approved a transportation appropriations bill that cut Amtrak funding by 19% the day after a tragic accident in which funding for maintenance and modernization was cited as a contributing factor. I was pleased to introduce the Build America Bonds legislation that was part of the original Make It in America agenda. We should revisit that proposal and a national infrastructure bank to not just maintain but also improve our transportation network.

Earlier this year, the House majority forced through what they called a new reauthorization of the America COMPETES Act, but their bill actually makes us less competitive. It cuts renewable energy R&D by 30%.

And this week, they again brought up an education bill that disinvests in our schools and weakens the college- and career-ready standards that will be critical to helping today's young people succeed and set the pace for the next economy.

To quote Oscar Wilde, our colleagues seem to "know the cost of everything yet the value of nothing." It's time we put forth an agenda that outlines the priorities we stand for -- not just as Democrats, but as Americans -- rather than what we are against, which is what Republicans in Congress have been focused on for the last five years.

We need an agenda that protects education and job training, invests in innovative research and basic infrastructure, and grows the economy so that our families and businesses actually can Make It in America.