

Statement of Patrick Gallagher
Nominee for Director of the National Institutes of Standards and
Technology

Nomination Hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science, and
Transportation Committee

October 15, 2009

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is a great honor to appear before you today as the nominee to be the Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

With your permission before I begin my statement, I would like to introduce you to my wife Karen, and my three sons, Sean, Devin, and Ryan who graciously skipped work and school this afternoon to be with me today.

I am a life-long scientist. I believe in the power of both basic research and of standardization to propel economic growth and improve our standards of living. I am committed to public service. If confirmed as Director, I look forward to combining these passions and managing NIST as it enters a new era.

I was born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and went to college in Kansas to study Physics and Philosophy. After teaching high school science and math for one year in Missouri, I returned to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh to pursue my interest in physics. This slow, eastward drift finally culminated in my arrival at NIST 16 years ago. Since then, my entire professional career has been in public service as a federal employee working at NIST, first as a beam line researcher at the NIST Center for Neutron Research, then serving as the Director of that Center, and most recently serving as Deputy Director for NIST.

I have had a wonderful, challenging career as a public servant. It is, therefore, a profound privilege and honor to have President Obama nominate me to serve as Director of NIST. I also want to thank Secretary Locke for his tremendous support for NIST and for placing his trust in me by recommending me for this position. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with all members of this Committee to ensure that NIST continues to perform its essential mission – and improves upon its core functions.

Since its founding in the middle of the nation's industrial revolution, NIST – or as it was known up until 1988, the National Bureau of Standards - has had a clear mandate to promote U.S. innovation and industrial competitiveness by advancing measurement science, standards, and technology that enhance economic security and improve our quality of life. For more than 108 years, NIST has carried out this role and made essential contributions to industry, science, public safety, and national security. Many of the technologies and measurements we take for granted today are based on the results of groundbreaking research at NIST and the transfer of that technology and know-how into practice: radio and telecommunications, radar, lasers, household smoke detectors, and computers. It is a very long list. Federal agencies depend on NIST for key measurement technologies to support their missions. U.S. manufacturers depend on NIST to address critical measurement problems, to develop and promote new technologies, to disseminate data and best practices, and to ensure that there is a fair and equitable market and a reliable supply chain through effective standards and a traceable system of measurements.

This is a remarkable history, and one which I've been privileged to be part of for the past 16 years. I believe that this legacy of achievement is built on a foundation of excellence, dedication, and integrity on the part of the NIST staff. The NIST reputation for "getting it right," for impartiality and for hard work are well deserved and have resulted in a remarkably productive national asset. NIST is a crown jewel of the nation's science and technology enterprise.

Today's world is quite different from the one 108 years ago, but I believe that the critical importance of NIST to the nation is not only undiminished, but has grown. Today, NIST is deeply engaged in some of the most urgent and critical challenges facing our country, including the Smart Grid, cyber security, electronic health records, climate change, and manufacturing. NIST expertise in measurement science and standards touches on these and many other sectors.

The President has emphasized that our economic prosperity depends upon our ability to lead the world in innovation. It is the foundation for creating high quality jobs for all Americans. Secretary Locke has focused the work of the Department of Commerce on this critical task to put the country back to work and build the foundations for long term economic prosperity. NIST is a key part of these strategies. Its mission is uniquely focused to provide critical expertise to address these particular challenges. In my view, NIST has never been in a more important position, and it has never been so important to the country that NIST succeed. Building upon the foundations of its talented work force, its world leading capabilities, and its legacy of working closely with industry and other stakeholders, NIST is ready to meet these challenges. If confirmed, I look forward to leading NIST in that effort.

As you can tell, I am passionate about the work before us. I am humbled and honored to be considered for this position and, if confirmed, I pledge to work in close partnership with Congress to develop effective solutions to these challenges.

I am grateful for your consideration of my nomination and for the opportunity to address the Committee. I look forward to any questions you may have.

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