

Testimony of Aneesh Chopra
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
May 19th, 2009

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is indeed a great honor to appear before you today. Compounding this honor is the opportunity to appear before my mentor, Senator Mark Warner, who has led the way in harnessing the power of technology to advance our public priorities.

I am grateful for President Obama's confidence in me to fulfill an important role and to Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Director Dr. John Holdren for his leadership in support of my nomination for Associate Director for Technology in OSTP within the Executive Office of the President. If confirmed, I look forward to working with all of you to ensure every American can participate in our vibrant technology-based economy and that we thoughtfully apply emerging technologies to address our nation's most pressing challenges.

With your permission, I would like to introduce the members of this committee to my wife Rohini and our daughters Naya and Devan. Next to them are my parents, Ram and Neelam Chopra, who, like so many immigrants, came to this country to live the American Dream. Following his graduate work in engineering at Villanova University and within his first decade of employment, my father contributed to our culture of innovation by filing three patents in the area of cooling refrigeration systems. Products carrying those technologies, built in my hometown of Trenton, NJ, are still in operations today.

I draw inspiration from my father who instilled in me the values of intellectual rigor, personal excellence and public service. His decision to bring me to Congressman Chris Smith's town hall meeting in Plainsboro, NJ, where I asked my first policy question at the age of 11, sparked my passion for service.

If confirmed by the Senate, I intend to channel that passion to execute on the President's vision for a 21st Century economy – harnessing the power and potential of new technologies to extend new opportunity to more Americans. Technology and innovation are hallmarks of the American story. They can often offer us powerful new opportunities of doing things never before possible or even imagined. By stewarding pragmatic policy choices, I believe we can make jobs more plentiful, America more competitive, communications more affordable, broadband more abundant, families more connected, and Americans more safe and secure. To do this we need to build on the President's vision for a 21st century government, one that builds on his core principles of transparency, participation and collaboration. We will apply the most innovative technologies to our most important challenges -- bending the healthcare cost curve, optimizing the energy grid to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, delivering an educational system focused on student excellence with special emphasis on science,

technology, engineering and mathematics, protecting our nation's critical infrastructure, and building the high-wage, high-growth jobs in all corners of our country.

I have seen the benefits of this approach in my most recent capacity serving as Virginia's Secretary of Technology under Governor Tim Kaine, ranked for the 2nd survey in a row by *Governing* magazine as the nation's top performing state, tied with Utah and Washington. We championed broadband and telework policies that brought good jobs to our more rural communities hard hit by an increasingly competitive global market. We invested in our universities to commercialize high value R&D and sought new collaborations across state boundaries to deliver a more productive regional approach.

But far more impactful, we worked to build a culture of innovation in the public sector that saw employees translating simple ideas into funded prototypes that aligned directly with legislative and executive priorities. Our Productivity Investment Fund channeled modest resources into 30+ projects that will deliver 4-1 returns on taxpayer investment over three years.

In Virginia, I was particularly struck by a bold proposition from our adult education community called *PlugGED In*. Nearly a million Virginians lack a high school diploma with a higher percentage in some of our more rural communities. Job prospects for dropouts are modest in today's skills-based economy but our spirit of innovation compelled one team to conceive of a new training program that would connect high school dropouts to technology jobs within six months. Typically, such a career path might take two or even three years at great cost and with modest probability of securing any job interviews. I knew we could do better.

With the Governor's support, our team reached out to a broader set of stakeholders – high schools, community colleges, 4-year institutions, and even technology companies interested in the results of such a model. Within six months of conceiving the idea and through a modest amount of seed funding, our innovative team built an entirely new curriculum combining the GED, a Microsoft certification, and a project assignment, recruited our first class of students in Southwest Virginia, and secured a commitment from one of our nation's premier technology companies to guarantee entry-level job interviews for every graduate. I eagerly await that ceremony later this summer but the experience reminds us that every American, regardless of background, deserves the chance to compete and win in our technology-based economy.

Two years ago, I joined in a celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Jamestown settlement and was reminded of the spirit of Commonwealth that continues to call on us to work together for the advancement of our common good. For many, the government we elect is the embodiment of that spirit. For others, it is a sense of neighborhood when we chip in to improve our communities or mentor a child striving to excel in school. Our modern technologies are collapsing the distance between idea and action. They are unleashing a new wave of entrepreneurship, involvement and service. It's this ability to connect and empower people by putting more power into people's hands that holds some of the greatest promise for solving America's challenges.

Shortly after the President's weekly address announcing his intention to nominate me, my third grade teacher, Ms. Linda Bruschi, "friended" me on Facebook, sharing her excitement for an old student she helped nurture through school. When I was still a child, she empowered me by taking a chance when it appeared I could push harder on more advanced mathematics. Because of her efforts, she helped me see the future and opened up a door for an exciting new world of opportunity. In the way she opened a door for me, I want to open a door for others. It's this wondrous idea of extending personal opportunity, fueled by new technologies, which especially excites me because it can help unlock the next chapter in America's grand story.

If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working with the world-class team assembled by President Obama, with the Congress, and particularly with the members of this committee to harness the power and potential of technology and innovation to advance our nation's goals.

I welcome any questions that the Committee may have.