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Congress Talks AI With Tech Titans

By Pablo Chavez, Ylli Bajraktari, Enrique Dans, Virginia Dignum and Koustubh Bagchi

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Senator Chuck Schumer is convening a closed-door meeting about artificial intelligence this week with some of tech's biggest names. It's a useful exercise, even without producing hard legislative proposals.



Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg; Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, Sam Altman, the CEO of ChatGPT company OpenAI, and a host of other prominent tech leaders, will speak at Senator Schumer's AI Summit this week. Senators will also hear from labor and civil rights advocates who have sounded the alarm about the technology's dangers.

While Europe is moving ahead with tough AI regulation, the US congressional sessions are closed-door listening sessions. The goal is to educate Congress. No US regulation is close to completion.

CEPA asked AI experts in both the US and Europe to assess the Washington meeting's significance. All found the listening approach useful in balancing innovation with regulation, even if it fails to head off a transatlantic divide. Comments have been edited for clarity and brevity.

Pablo Chavez

Senator Chuck Schumer's AI forums are fundamentally about three things.

First, they set the stage by continuing to introduce the players and their positions to Congress and the broader policy community. AI policy issues are multifaceted. Some are about protecting jobs and livelihoods. Others are about protecting the very existence of humanity. Few are strictly black and white.

Second, the forums will show congressional progress at a time when major legislation is unlikely to happen in the run-up to the 2024 elections. Yet bipartisan progress can be made through education and engagement — and potentially alignment around a legislative framework or voluntary commitments.

Third and critical vis-à-vis Europe, the Indo-Pacific, and the rest of the world, the Senate AI forums demonstrate American leadership. They send a strong signal to allies and adversaries alike about advancing AI in a safe, secure, and beneficial way.

Pablo Chavez is an Adjunct Senior Fellow with the Center for a New American Security's Technology and National Security Program, and a former public policy executive at Google, LinkedIn, and Microsoft.

Enrique Dans

Although the US “voluntary” approach, in opposition to the EU’s “normative” approach, has its merits, we know that it may be insufficient to minimize the technology’s potential dangers. Voluntary guidelines foster innovation but lack accountability. They depend too much on the ethical guidelines set by the companies themselves. In many cases, those guidelines are loose.

A comprehensive framework is needed. It should include clear guidelines and regulations to ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability. It should promote ethical AI development, rigorous testing, and continuous monitoring to detect and rectify biases and disinformation.

We should roll out test sandboxes where products can be tested and subjected to independent observation. Independent expert groups could challenge products created by companies to identify vulnerabilities and potential misuse. Applied to AI, testboxes can help ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability, scrutinizing AI systems for biases and disinformation before these products are launched.

Enrique Dans is a Professor of Innovation at IE University in Madrid.

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Ylli Bajraktari

The inaugural AI Insight Forum is a pivotal step to address the novel challenges posed by AI with bipartisan support. Lawmakers’ questions could lay the groundwork for potential solutions.

We are at an inflection point. AI provides new attack surfaces threatening our democratic institutions. But AI also promises to increase our prosperity by providing better healthcare and education.

There is not one solution that will allow us to mitigate the harms while reaping the benefits. We need a whole-of-society approach. In the short term, that means voluntary commitments from leading AI companies. In the long term, we will need legislative and regulatory requirements where these voluntary steps fall short or leave gaps.

Ylli Bajraktari is President and CEO of the Special Competitive Studies Project, a non-partisan, non-profit initiative that aims to strengthen America's long-term competitiveness in artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies.

Koustubh "K.J." Bagchi

The far-reaching impact of artificial intelligence necessitates robust legislative efforts. Senator Chuck Schumer has taken a smart approach by engaging with a range of stakeholders. The list of attendees demonstrates his commitment to legislating based on feedback from a broad set of partners.

While the contributions of major tech companies have been crucial in addressing the potential risks of AI, a voluntary approach is not sufficient. Instead, clearly outlined rules must be established.

At the same time, broad regulatory approaches that lack explicit goals or negatively impact American innovation should be avoided. Congress should avoid rushing a licensing regime just to satisfy lawmakers who believe something must be done.

Koustubh "K.J." Bagchi is VP of Technology Policy at the Chamber of Progress, a left-leaning tech industry coalition.

Virginia Dignum

Legislating AI is not an easy task, as we in Europe are well aware. The US approach aims to find a balance between regulating AI's potential risks and preserving US leadership. Such a view seems to suggest that there are two options: either you regulate, or you innovate.

This is a common misconception: Responsible AI is not an option! Well-designed, and broadly supported, regulation can be a stepping stone for innovation, a beacon pointing out the direction to go and ensuring public acceptance.

Virginia Dignum is a Professor in Responsible Artificial Intelligence and the Scientific Director of the Humanities and Society Program at Umeå University in Sweden.

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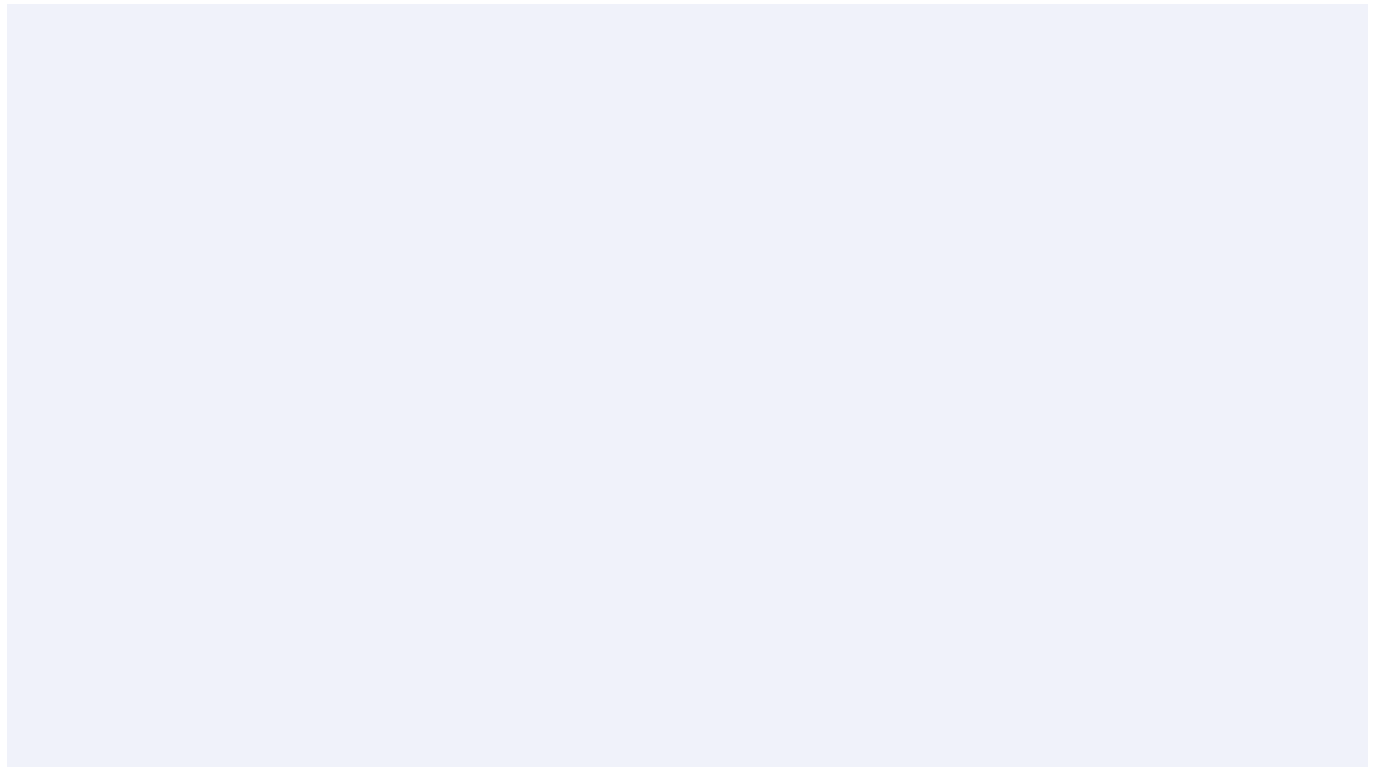


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