

Testimony by Congressman G. K. Butterfield (NC-01)
Chairman, Congressional Black Caucus
Make It In America Hearing
July 9, 2015

Mr. Hoyer, for the last five years you have united us around a critical agenda focused on “Making It in America” so that cities and towns across this country could not only build products, but build an economy that benefits us all. President Obama has already signed 16 “Make it in America” bills into law and we continue to develop advanced manufacturing technology that has served as the impetus for a manufacturing renaissance in the United States.

Since joining the Energy and Commerce Committee in 2007, I have been a strong advocate for growing the innovation economy. From immigration to cyber security, privacy to patent reform, Congress, the Administration, and the private sector must be equal partners in developing policies that keep pace with emerging technology, not stifle it. The forty-six members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), collectively representing more than 30 million Americans, are acutely aware of the unique challenges and the promising opportunities that come with creating jobs of the future.

But, America has yet to unlock the full potential of innovation because of the lack of African American representation in the Internet economy. The gross underrepresentation of African Americans on corporate boards, in the tech workforce, in contracting with these companies, and at venture capital firms is alarming.

While African Americans make up just six percent of the STEM-related workforce, they are prolific users of technology. A Pew Research Center report shows that African Americans use the Internet and social media as often as their white counterparts and in some cases, even more frequently. But African Americans’ embrace of technology and social media has not translated into technology jobs or seats on boards of directors.

For example, African Americans make up only two percent of the total workforce at social media giants Facebook and Twitter. While some progress has been made, much more needs to be done. Additionally, neither company has an African American serving on its board. These companies are certainly not alone in their need to increase African American representation at all levels of their business. According to a recent Rainbow PUSH Coalition survey of 20 tech companies, African Americans hold just three out of 189 seats on major tech company boards of directors. America can do better.

That’s why the Congressional Black Caucus launched CBC TECH 2020 to bring together the best minds in the tech, non-profit, education, and public sectors to achieve full representation of African Americans at every level of the technology industry by 2020.

First, we must make targeted investments in STEM education starting in middle school. According to the Level Playing Field Institute, there will be an estimated 1.4 million new tech jobs by 2020. Seventy percent of those jobs will remain unfilled at the current rate U.S. universities are producing qualified graduates for these roles.

The solution cannot be to simply look abroad for people to fill these roles. America must develop “home grown” talent – men and women from rural and urban America – those from well represented and underrepresented communities – to power the innovation economy. We must also ensure that our Historically

Black Colleges and Universities have the resources necessary to prepare our students to be competitive in the tech economy.

Second, we must see greater transparency from tech companies, particularly those who have not released their diversity data. This is the first step toward improving the diversity of the industry.

Finally, we invite organizations to work with us to produce a TECH 2020 African American Inclusion Plan. Each company would draft a plan that fits its unique circumstances in the marketplace and would set goals, commit resources, and outline action items to increase African American inclusion. We want to work in partnership with you to produce substantive and attainable goals.

Colleagues, we know that the best days of American innovation are ahead, but we can only truly be successful if we put all of our best minds to work.

Thank you.