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Statement of Matthew Biggs, President
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE
AI Forum: National Security
Wednesday, December 6 – 3:00pm to 5:00pm
Kennedy Caucus Room, Russell Senate Office Building (SR-325)

My name is Matthew Biggs and I am the President of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE). IFPTE is an AFL-CIO and Canadian Labour Congress affiliated labor union representing 90,000 public, private and federal sector workers in the United States and Canada.

I want to thank Majority Leader Schumer and Senator Rounds, Senator Heinrich, and Senator Young for hosting this ninth forum in a series dedicated to examining Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its impact on our society at large, and all aspects of our daily lives. Today's forum is focusing on AI's impact on our national security and military capabilities. IFPTE, which represents tens of thousands of workers in the defense space, particularly federal workers employed by the Department of Navy, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Defense Logistics Agency, as well as private sector employees in the aerospace and defense industry, has a keen interest in this issue, particularly as it relates to Congress' oversight role in AI implementation.

My comments come from the perspective of IFPTE-represented critical infrastructure and national security workers who have expressed strong concerns about AI's impact on our homeland and national security, as well as to the future of their jobs. Engineers and scientists we represent are eager to apply AI-based tools to technical problems and contribute to the innovation and responsible development of these technologies, while clearly recognizing the risks of taking human oversight out of the process. We also recognize the potential negative consequences of AI

and the need for regulation to protect the privacy and economic security of individuals and workers.

I will focus my comments on three key areas of concern. First, AI has the potential to replace human discretion in decision making with algorithmic decision making in instances that introduce new and significant risks to national security. Second, as AI technologies proliferate in the national security realm, lawmakers and policymakers need to prioritize the public interest in the development of AI over that of the profit-making priorities of the private sector. And third, I will provide a real time example of automation of critical infrastructures and AI that will replace human decisionmakers and impact federal workers, including workers represented not only by IFPTE, but also NFFE, the IBEW and LiUNA – with little insight or accounting for the significant new risks to national security and public safety.

IFPTE has long witnessed the federal government, particularly the Department of Defense (DOD), erroneously contract out to the private sector very critical core competencies. They have done so to the point that the Federal Government becomes completely reliant on contractors to perform jobs that were, and still should be, government functions. By outsourcing these competencies and critical mission areas, federal agencies have struggled to monitor and provide necessary oversight of these outsourced activities. In IFPTE's experience in representing DOD federal workers, once the government loses this core human infrastructure to the private sector, it is gone for good. This is particularly true when it comes to IT work. Left unchecked, the DOD, and our Intelligence and Homeland Security agencies could outsource even more critical, in-house functions performed by federal employees to the private sector. To make it even more alarming, these agencies have the ability to do so without going through the normal contracting out process, known as A-76, by declaring that certain functions are so important to national security that they can simply ignore the contracting out process altogether. It is IFPTE's view that any work performed by government employees that is deemed an "inherently governmental function," "closely associated with inherently governmental functions," or subject to the national security exemption, be completely protected from being replaced by AI provided by a private sector

contractor. This threshold is necessary to build and maintain AI expertise within the federal defense industrial base and is essential to the responsible development, innovation, implementation, and procurement of AI for the public interest and for our national security.

To further ensure that our national security AI policies support the development of world-leading technologies and practices that support democracy, prosperity, and our national defense, IFPTE believes lawmakers should view and legislate robust and ironclad worker protections as our nation's competitive advantage. A good blueprint of such an approach is included in President Biden's AI executive order, which stresses the importance of preserving workers rights and interests, including the right to collective bargaining. All too often decisions are being made by government officials at all levels that impact our national and homeland security without the input of those who are actually doing the work day in and day out to protect us. IFPTE is a union that was organized in 1918 by Navy workers at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard. Today IFPTE proudly represents workers at all four of the public Navy Yards. These civilian workers and others throughout the DOD are laser focused on doing the work necessary to support our military personnel, and to protect our national security. Needless to say, if asked and included in the decision making process of applying AI technologies – from design, development, deployment, implementation, and validation – they would prioritize our national security interest above all else, versus permitting profit-making priorities to influence these critical national security determinations. Make no mistake, neglecting to engage the workers themselves will lead to regrettable outcomes.

I also want to say a word about the importance of domestic workforce development, not only in the defense industry, but in STEM industries across sectors. Under President Biden's leadership we have accomplished the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the CHIPS and Science Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act. These are all bills that IFPTE supported and that offer a generational opportunity for our nation when it comes to investing in our domestic workforce and creating equitable pathways to good jobs. Congress should be very careful to guard against the overzealous and unchecked implementation of AI from undermining this

historic opportunity, by discouraging employers from seeking alternatives to workforce development that bring in international workers under a variety of work visa programs like the H-1B and L-1 programs, among others. Existing federal policies for guest workers distort the labor market, incentivize reliance on under-regulated visa programs, and suppress rights, wages, and conditions in STEM fields. These guestworker programs are also unfair to the guestworkers themselves, who have little to no job mobility, are often time compensated well below the labor market standards, and whose ability to remain in this country is dependent on remaining employed by their sponsoring company. Simply stated, any corporate interest that receives taxpayer dollars to create AI should be made to invest in workforce development and to hire American and permanent resident workers who are already here in America.

Finally, I want to outline a real time example of AI replacing federal workers employed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). IFPTE believes this example presents many dangers, including when it comes to our homeland security, our economic security and cybersecurity.

Much to the dismay of IFPTE, and over our objections, the USACE is currently moving forward with implementing remote operations at our nation's hydroelectric dams, and has plans to expand these operations to our navigational locks and dams. The plan includes replacing on-site federal workers at these critical infrastructures and moving lock and dam operations and hydroelectric dam operations to a central location. This would not only result in the loss of good-paying, union represented jobs, it would also put a huge target on these remote operations for a cyber-attack, threatening communities located near these dams, and businesses and supply chains that rely on our nation's inland waterways. While USACE has minimized the impact of remote operations and has yet to engage with unions that represent workers on these critical infrastructures, the frontline federal workers on these critical infrastructures understand that removing onsite personnel and human decisionmakers is a significant change in operations that creates numerous risks for DOD's continuity of command over this national transportation asset. Unfortunately, the USACE has failed to provide transparency and appears ready to

expand these remote operations. As such, it is a perfect example of where Congress needs to step in and provide oversight and regulation, including putting a halt on this program.

At the end of the day, our national lawmakers must provide the utmost scrutiny whenever the possibility of replacing human judgement in national security decisions with AI arises. Guardrails must be put in place that protect our national and homeland security technologies that we rely on from foreign attacks and from foreign interference. Our national strategy to support American AI innovation and leadership needs to include workers and their unions and needs to build and maintain core competencies within the federal government.   While doing so, American workers and families, and our society as a whole, must be the benefactors of AI.

IFPTE thanks Leader Schumer again for holding these critically important forums on AI and looks forward to being part of a nation with AI that puts the interests of our nation, our national security and of workers ahead of all else.