Today, the technology sector and policymakers are talking right past each other, which presents serious dangers both to the tech world and to our economy as a whole. Both groups are of central importance to our collective ability to address the major fiscal and competitiveness challenges facing the country. We simply can’t afford to have technologists and policymakers ignore or misunderstand each other. The stakes are too high.

The technology sector can’t just assume that legal and regulatory problems will sort themselves out or that society will always make room for a cool new product. Politicians can’t afford to stay ignorant of new technologies and remain behind the curve while society continues to undergo rapid and constant changes thanks to new and innovative products and services. Artificial intelligence, programmable biology, the Internet of Things—the full impact of these and other technologies all bring vast public policy implications. If we ignore them, or fail to truly understand them, we do so at our own peril. In fact, we end up inviting backward regulations put in place by political, regulatory, or legal authorities who often don’t know quite what they’re dealing with. The effect of those regulations can be disruptive, misguided, and in some cases, downright dangerous.
For the future of a vibrant tech sector and the long-term competitiveness of our economy, there needs to be a bridge between the engineers and the politicians—to promote better understanding and drive good policy outcomes that foster technology development, rather than impede it.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce started the Center for Advanced Innovation and Technology to tell the story of technology in our economy, to help evolve the mindset of policymakers, and to lead rational policy solutions that will drive the U.S. economy for years to come. The Chamber is well placed to be a part of the solution in five primary ways:

1 Business is the answer, not the problem. The Chamber helps our nation’s leaders understand how business drives productivity, growth, and hiring. When public policy holds back the private sector, it also holds back our economy and stifles opportunity and prosperity for individuals. That’s especially true for technology. It represents one of the largest and fastest growing sectors, and there’s no sector of our economy that it doesn’t touch. In fact, technology today makes up growing sectors, and there’s no sector of our economy that it doesn’t touch. In fact, technology today makes up one of the largest and fastest growing sectors, and there’s no sector of our economy that it doesn’t touch.

Technology provides the capacity to drive the solutions to many of our challenges big and small. We must not allow misinformation, misunderstanding, or fear limit that potential. We must tell that story in the public debate without hesitation or apology—and in terms our leaders will understand and appreciate.

2 The Chamber helps bring focus and clarity to business and economic issues that lawmakers don’t understand or would prefer to ignore. One of the biggest complaints I hear from tech leaders is that policymakers are willfully ignorant of technology. Worse still are the instances in which politicians wade into the tech space without truly grasping it. The Chamber is not afraid to force the issue when it’s being ignored. We won’t hesitate to call out and correct our leaders when they’re wrong on policy, and we educate and advocate for the kinds of policies that will allow technology to flourish and fulfill its potential in a competitive economy.

3 We have an unparalleled ability to convene all the players, find common interests between seemingly disparate stakeholders, and bring them together to work toward shared goals. A great example is the leading role the Chamber has played in building a broad coalition to support immigration reform. The Chamber helps rally business, labor, religious and ethnic groups, law enforcement, and technology around pragmatic reforms that will ultimately serve everyone’s interests.

4 The Chamber has unmatched resources and capabilities to get things done. We have the muscle of some 3 million businesses behind us, and we work with 116 American Chambers of Commerce in 103 countries, operate 11 business councils, and run a dozen initiatives to help American companies do business around the world. We also boast some of the country’s foremost domestic and foreign policy experts, lawyers, lobbyists, and communicators on our staff.

For more than 100 years, the Chamber has been enabling growth and advancement in the private sector. Through our work to promote policies that nurture innovation, and by advocating for the free market to foster and deploy new technologies, we’ve proudly played a role in the successive advancements that have brought us to where we are now.

THE TECHNOLOGY AGENDA

We are in an era in which the next wave of the digital revolution and the spirit of entrepreneurship are propelling our nation forward at a breathtaking pace—a long with much of the rest of the world. This is only the beginning of what could be the most transformative period of technological progress in history. The Chamber supports policies that will allow all American businesses to compete and succeed in a dynamic global economy, and we are helping pioneer and promote the policies needed to keep up with the unique challenges and opportunities that technology brings.

IMMIGRATION

America is in a global race for talent, and with our current, broken immigration system, we’re not in a position to come out ahead. Our system doesn’t serve the interests of our society, our economy, or the interests of businesses—especially those in the tech sector who need a steady pipeline of talent. Anyone who has attempted to secure a visa for a high-skilled worker knows what a maddening process it can be. This spring, more than 172,000 H1B visa applications were filed for the 85,000 slots allotted by Congress—and they were ultimately determined by lottery. The numbers of high-skilled visas should be determined by the needs of the market, not by arbitrary caps. Reform will help us attract and retain global entrepreneurial talent. The Chamber has supported efforts on Capitol Hill to provide green cards to immigrant entrepreneurs, and we also support reforms to secure our borders, expand visa programs for all skill levels, establish a workable and reliable national employee verification system, and provide a pathway out of the shadows for the 11 million undocumented workers in America today.

EDUCATION REFORM

If we want to build a competitive 21st century workforce equipped with the skills for the jobs of the future, we must take a hard look at what is and isn’t working in our system. While the United States is home to many of the world’s greatest institutions of higher learning, our public K-12 education system is failing badly. Broadly speaking, the system isn’t producing students who are proficient in science, math, and reading. Without that foundation, it’s
difficult to build strong skills in technology and engineering, as well as the problem solving and critical thinking skills necessary for innovation. To help close the skills gap, the Chamber is aggressively promoting high educational standards in America’s schools and effective workforce training systems. We’re also exploring new ways the business community can help proactively build talent pipelines.

**TAX REFORM**

We need a competitive tax system that creates a level playing field for American businesses. Yet, our current tangled tax code is anything but competitive, and high marginal tax rates put U.S. businesses at a disadvantage in the global economy. We continue to advocate for pro-growth, comprehensive tax reform that will lower both corporate and individual rates, broaden the tax base, and simplify compliance. We are also fighting for provisions that will keep innovation humming, including a permanent extension of the R&D tax credit. We know that a simpler, simpler, streamlined tax system can help unleash the power of American businesses to expand and hire, invest and innovate, and compete in a global economy.

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT**

Another imperative for U.S. competitiveness is global commerce. Expanding trade and investment has helped foster the high-tech boom and created more than 25 million jobs for Americans over the past 15 years, and the Chamber is playing a leading role in the passage of all major trade deals. Currently, we are focused on completion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which would grant U.S. businesses access to some of the most vibrant markets in the world. We are also aggressively advocating for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which would expand the commercial relationship between the United States and Europe. And we continue to press hard for the passage of a Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) bill, which would grant the president the authority to negotiate trade deals. Without TPA, potential trading partners will be hesitant to pursue agreements with the United States for fear of having to negotiate them twice—once with the administration and then again with Congress.

**GLOBAL REGULATORY COOPERATION**

While we pursue opportunities for stronger trade ties, we’re also working toward greater global regulatory cooperation on everything from intellectual property to investment. Cross-border data flows have emerged as one of the major regulatory challenges. In today’s global economy, consumers, regulators, and businesses all benefit from a constant stream of data flowing seamlessly between countries. The Chamber’s Center for Global Regulatory Cooperation, in coordination with our regional teams, is leading the business community’s efforts to push back against misguided policies that could potentially cut off data flows or impose localization requirements.

**DATA SECURITY, CYBERSECURITY, AND PRIVACY**

On the policy challenge of keeping both data and cyber-infrastructure secure while protecting the privacy of individuals, the Chamber believes that industry self-regulation and technology-neutral best business practices are the most effective way to enhance innovation, investment, competition, and privacy. In our free market system, companies that fail to meet consumers’ privacy and security expectations can expect to face swift and decisive marketplace and reputational consequences. The Chamber also supports cybersecurity information-sharing legislation that includes robust safeguards for businesses that voluntarily exchange data with their peers and government partners. Targeted information sharing and mitigation efforts, coupled with the right liability protections, are the best ways to strengthen cyber protections for companies. These tools can coexist with important protections for individuals’ privacy.

**DATA-DRIVEN INNOVATION**

Beyond issues of regulation and privacy, data will increasingly be a part of the policy debate. All sectors of the U.S. economy—including financial services, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, agriculture and many more—collect and use data to spur sales and job growth, enhance productivity, enable cost savings, improve efficiency, protect consumers, and improve lives in the United States and around the world. Data-driven innovation must be fostered and encouraged. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Data-Driven Innovation Project is exploring and promoting the economic and social value of data. It’s important that we study the implications and get the policies right.

Technology is a platform for a vibrant and growing economy and a pathway to a bright and prosperous future. Technology companies need to be allowed to be technology companies. They need to have the freedom and the flexibility to innovate and create, free from the burden of overregulation and unencumbered by misguided rules. Everything the Chamber does is designed to drive home the point to politicians, policymakers, and the public that business is the solution, not the problem, and that technology is an asset, not a threat.

David C. Chavern is executive vice president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and president of the Center for Advanced Technology & Innovation (CATI). Under Chavern’s leadership, the Chamber launched CATI in 2014 to expand engagement with high-tech industries on policy development, regulatory issues, and international opportunities and challenges and to represent the interests of technology companies. Through advocacy, research, events, and partnerships, CATI seeks to unleash entrepreneurship and technology development in high-tech centers across the nation. Before taking the helm of CATI, Chavern served as chief operating officer of the Chamber for more than seven years.