Former Texas Congressman Will Hurd recently shared his insights on technology policy on the Building Trust in Government podcast. Joining host Jim Cook and guest host Dave Powner of MITRE, Hurd discussed the challenges and opportunities facing policymakers when it comes to developing policy that encourages technological innovation and entrepreneurship, while at the same time anticipating secondary consequences.

**On Preventing Unintended Outcomes**

Hurd believes it’s critical to anticipate and assess the possible impacts, both positive and negative, of adopting cutting edge technology in our everyday lives, and to prepare in advance.

“Let’s go back in time to right before social media became a thing,” he said. “Were there people thinking—Hey, this could lead to young girls having negative images of themselves, and cutting themselves and having bad images of their bodies? Could we have prepared for that?”

As another example, he cited the impact of artificial general intelligence (AGI) and its potential to drastically reduce the costs of goods and services. AGI, also known as strong AI or deep AI, has the capacity to mimic human intelligence in applications like chatbots, self-driving cars, or even housekeeping robots. With the explosion of AI and AGI, said Hurd, it’s important that algorithms follow the law, protecting civil rights and civil liberties during every stage of adoption.

Hurd stressed the need for having “really smart policy people” thinking about new tech environments and looking at the full range of potential outcomes, both positive and negative.

**On Regulation**

The former Congressman also stressed the importance of Congress fulfilling its oversight role so that any legislation is “shining the light on the right things.”

Regulation by itself is not a bad word,” said Hurd. But he favors using existing laws whenever possible to address challenges associated with new technologies. He thinks it’s important to ensure consistency for the private sector, so that companies can understand the regulatory framework in which they’re operating and can remain competitive in the global marketplace.

The key to developing policy, in Hurd’s view, is data—gathering metrics that are leading rather than lagging indicators—to help legislators understand if they’re moving in the right direction as new technologies are rolling out, rather than having policy fights afterward.

To adapt to changing technologies in real time, we must “move with a speed that Congress is not used to,” admitted Hurd. He added that it’s critical to work across party lines and get the backing of both chambers of Congress.

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**On Federal IT Modernization**

Hurd, who was a champion for improving the federal government’s information technology posture while in Congress, believes the federal government itself needs to be more proactive in managing its IT infrastructure—intensifying its focus on cyber threats, implementing quantum resilient algorithms, and moving more quickly to the cloud.

“We all need to be working to make sure the government is introducing the greatest and best technology to provide better digital-facing services,” he said.

He believes Americans will “start trusting the government a little bit more” if agencies provide better services and a better customer experience.

**On Strategic Competition with China**

Beyond the question of policymaking and customer service is the issue of global competitiveness.

“This is not just about developing technology for our own sake,” Hurd explained. “We are literally in a competition with the Chinese government … China [is trying to] surpass the United States of America as a global superpower, and they know that they’re going to do that by being a leader in advanced technologies.”

“We have to get these questions right because we want our values and the ideas of Western democracies to drive the development of these tools, not authoritarian, autocratic regimes,” he cautioned.

**Our Final Thoughts**

Policy plays a critical role in harnessing rapidly evolving technology and avoiding negative consequences to our safety and security. We are a digital society, and policymakers must be digitally aware and literate, while technologists, innovators, and researchers must work closely with policymakers to focus on what’s best for users and society overall, not just what’s possible technically.

As federal, state, and local governments rely more and more on digital engagement with the public to provide services and shape the “customer experience,” trust in government can be enhanced by using policy as a strategic, forward-looking catalyst to accelerate U.S.-led research, innovation, and development, while at the same time applying the right degree of thoughtful, pragmatic controls to avoid or minimize negative consequences and vulnerabilities to individuals, businesses, governments, and the nation.