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Nanotechnology: Successful Commercialization Depends on Adequate Oversight, Risk Research Strategy, and Public Engagement

David Rejeski Addresses Senate Committee on Importance of Government Readiness for Nanotechnology Commercialization

WASHINGTON – Today, at hearings convened by the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Trade, Tourism and Economic Development, the Woodrow Wilson Center's Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies director David Rejeski testified that the country's "ability to reap the long-term benefits of nanotechnology—in areas from medicine to energy and food production—will depend heavily on how we manage the introduction of the first generation of nanotechnology products."

Rejeski noted that, according to a recently released Project inventory, there currently are 230 manufacturer-identified nanotechnology consumer products on the market—everything from sunscreens and cosmetics to bumpers on automobiles. This does not include over 600 raw materials, intermediate components and industrial equipment items that EmTech Research projects are currently in use by manufacturers.

NanoBiotech News estimates there also are 130 nano-based drugs and delivery systems, and 125 medical devices or diagnostic tests in preclinical, clinical or commercial development, an increase of 68 percent since last year. By 2015, the National Science Foundation estimates that nanotechnology will have a $1 trillion impact on the global economy and employ 2 million workers.

"We are about to be inundated with hundreds, if not thousands, of new products," according to Rejeski. "But governments are not ready. Industry and trade groups are not prepared. A research strategy for addressing possible human health or environmental risks is not in place, and the public is not informed."

In his testimony, Rejeski puts forward a number of practical recommendations to address these challenges. They include carefully planned and adequately resourced research into possible environmental, health and safety risks; an integrated oversight regime that is transparent, efficient and predictable; a one-stop-shop for businesses, especially small and medium-sized companies, to help with nanotechnology commercialization; and greater public engagement.

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"There is no 'pause button' for technological innovation that government can conveniently push to create time for research, testing, policy deliberation, or a few more public meetings…Without better foresight, today's answers will be for yesterday's nanotechnology questions."

Rejeski's written testimony is available online at www.nanotechproject.org or http://www.wilsoncenter.org/nano

Nanotechnology is the ability to measure, see, predict and make things on the scale of atoms and molecules, usually in the realm of between 1 and 100 nanometers. A nanometer is one billionth of a meter. The width of a human hair is approximately 100,000 nanometers.

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The **Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies** was launched in April 2005 by the Woodrow Wilson Center and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It is dedicated to helping business, governments, and the public anticipate and manage the possible human and environmental implications of nanotechnology.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is a national charitable organization serving the public interest by informing the public, advancing policy solutions and supporting civic life. The Trusts' national Health and Human Services policy program addresses a range of issues, such as foster care, reproductive genetics technology and retirement security. Its hallmark is investments to engage experts, explore divergent views, identify options and build consensus on policy solutions—all with the goal of improving the health and well-being of the American people.

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