Pacific Technology Policy Conference

2024 Conference Summary

Advances in digital connectivity and emerging technologies are increasingly shaping global strategic competition, necessitating greater cooperation on technology and innovation policy between the United States and its Indo-Pacific partners. As the nation's gateway to the Pacific and a major technology hub, the Pacific Northwest is a critical base for these partnerships—at both the governmental and private sector levels. It is therefore a linchpin in achieving key U.S. strategic and economic objectives in the Indo-Pacific.

Recognizing the importance of these issues in the Pacific Northwest, the National Bureau of Asian Research hosted its inaugural Pacific Technology Policy Conference in Seattle on March 13, 2024. The conference convened high-level and policy-relevant discussions between U.S. and Indo-Pacific public and private sector stakeholders on key technology policy questions. Over 80 attendees participated in the full-day conference, hosted at K&L Gates Seattle and sponsored by the **Korea Foundation (KF)**, **K&L Gates, Microsoft,** and **Strider Technologies.** The conference was covered in the Seattle media by Axios.

The conference opened with remarks from **Congresswoman Suzan DelBene** (D-WA), conference chair **Tami Overby**, and KF president **Gheewhan Kim**. Representative DelBene highlighted how her experiences as both an entrepreneur in the tech sector and a member of Congress have showed her the importance of programs such as the Pacific Technology Policy Conference that seek to bring these two audiences together. President Kim noted that addressing challenges associated with AI risk and geopolitical competition in the tech domain will require collective action across these sectors.

The conference's *first panel* covered cooperation between the United States and like-minded partners. Panelists noted how the rise of China is influencing both U.S. policy and U.S. partners, such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, and leading to the securitization of international technology and economic policy.

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The *second panel* covered the global governance of AI, examining how countries are cooperating to regulate the technology and how regulation is dealing with the incredibly rapid technical advances seen over the past year. Panelists noted the importance of an "innovation-forward" U.S. regulatory ecosystem.

In the afternoon, Ignition Partners co-founder and NBR Board of Directors member **Jonathan Roberts** delivered remarks that highlighted some of the challenges that government and private sector stakeholders must overcome when engaging with each other and the role that institutions like NBR can play in supporting that process. The conference's *third panel* then examined cross-border data flows, covering both efforts to protect data and enable these flows and the associated economic and innovative benefits. Panelists highlighted the groundbreaking nature of the recent U.S. executive order restricting cross-border data flows to countries of concern as the first meaningful U.S. policy step to regulate these flows, while noting that this remains far short of the comprehensive frameworks seen in U.S. partner countries. Panelists also pointed out that China has made far more progress in reckoning with the economic and technological implications of the emergence of data and the digital economy—a development that could leave countries focused too narrowly on data security questions behind the curve in utilizing and leveraging data for economic development and technological advancement.

The *final panel* unpacked the recent escalation of U.S. export controls targeting semiconductors, highlighting the challenge posed by China's rise that motivated these controls; the sea change represented by a shift from tactical, end-user-centric controls to strategic national-level restrictions; and the impact of these controls on the private sector.

Following the four panels, the conference concluded with a series of breakout sessions. One session looked at recent and upcoming developments in U.S. technology policy, with a particular focus on the Congress—building on NBR's long-standing track record of deep engagement with congressional leaders on Asia policy. A second session covered the U.S.-Taiwan semiconductor partnership and how this critical bilateral relationship underpins progress across so many other technology domains. The final breakout session examined how policymakers and researchers can utilize trade data to identify and mitigate potential uses of technology that violate export controls.

The conference concluded with closing remarks that highlighted next year's Pacific Technology Policy Conference, scheduled for February 2025. Key topics that will be covered in the 2025 conference will include cybersecurity, biotech/biopharma, EV batteries, and quantum computing. A full report from this year's conference will be available on NBR's website shortly.