

Compete Connect

May 2024 Edition

From the CEO's Desk



Deborah L. Wince-Smith
President and CEO
Council on Competitiveness

Dear Council Members and Friends,

Nearly five years ago, the Council's leadership recognized the convergence of disruptive technological revolutions, offering unparalleled challenges and opportunities for the nation's long-term security, productivity potential, and inclusive prosperity goals. This understanding contributed in large part to the launch of the National Commission on Innovation and Competitiveness Frontiers, a multi-year initiative with over 60 National Commissioners, all focused on the goal of bolstering America's innovation capacity and capability to drive long-term productivity growth and inclusive prosperity.

Phase 1 of the National Commission's work, 2020-2023, identified the need to redefine "place" within the innovation economy, ensuring every community in the United States can contribute to and reap the benefits from innovation. In line with this effort, and under the auspices of the National Commission, the Council's leadership launched the "Competitiveness Conversations Across America" – a series of high-level, multi-stakeholder, local, state, and regional gatherings to understand emerging, next and best innovation practices, and to amplify the country's cutting edge to national attention.

The inaugural edition of the Competitiveness Conversations, themed "Tennessee—Redefining Place & Building the Future Innovation Ecosystem for Mobility, Energy & Manufacturing," took place at Vanderbilt University on April 25-26, 2024. This event brought together over 250 attendees, including notable speakers like Governor Bill Lee and U.S. Senators Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagerty – as well as the C-suite leadership from critical stakeholders in Tennessee's innovation ecosystem: FedEx,

Ford, Oracle, Nissan, Volkswagen, Bridgestone, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. We reviewed Tennessee’s ingredients for innovation – the critical ways in which it is fostering an environment that attracts investment, propels business expansion, and strengthens its economy. I am grateful to Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier and The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman for co-hosting this debut – as well as to a very distinguished Steering Committee, which helped to shape our agenda, and to all of our speakers and participants. While a full summary report is in the works, you can get a flavor of the Conversation from my May [Forbes.com](#) article, “People, Partnerships, and Place.”

And Tennessee was just the start – we are excited to be deep in planning for two more 2024 Competitiveness Conversations. Our next, kicking off under the leadership of Boise State President Marlene Tromp and Idaho National Laboratory Director John Wagner, will take place in Boise, August 6-8, focused on the future of semiconductors, clean energy, advanced nuclear, and cybersecurity. Registration is now open, and the teams look forward to welcoming you in Boise. [Register today.](#)

Please also mark your calendars to join us for the 2024 Gala Dinner and National Competitiveness Forum scheduled for December 2-3 in Washington, DC at the historic Willard InterContinental. Keep an eye out for a save-the-date as well as a sponsorship brochure – both coming soon.

The Council’s other key initiatives continue apace. In the first week of June, we will convene the fourth round of our four National Commission virtual Working Groups. In addition, over forty university leaders from our University Leadership Forum issued recently a joint statement calling on Congress to fully fund the “science” portion of the Chips and Science Act. Despite the transformative potential of this legislation, insufficient subsequent funding has left America’s strength in science and technology at risk, with a significant funding gap of nearly \$6 billion at the National Science Foundation alone. Leveraging our influential network of higher education leaders, the Council has urged Congress to uphold its commitment to advancing U.S. leadership in science and technology by fully funding the CHIPS and Science Act in FY2025, and help usher in the next wave of technologies and talent that will drive U.S. competitiveness forward. [Read the statement here.](#)

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Wince-Smith
President & CEO
Council on Competitiveness

Competitiveness Conversations

"Competitiveness Conversations Across America" Debuts in Tennessee

The Council kicked off its “Competitiveness Conversations Across America” summit series at Vanderbilt University on April 25-26, 2024. Thanks to the close partnership and generosity of co-hosts, Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier and The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman, the debut Competitiveness Conversation – themed “Tennessee—Redefining Place & Building the Future Innovation Ecosystem for Mobility, Energy & Manufacturing”—inspired the more than 250 attendees from across Tennessee and the country. The Council team is working on a detailed summary report from the Conversation.

Please read an op-ed from Chancellor Diermeier, Chancellor Plowman, and Council CEO Deborah Wince-Smith recently published in *The Tennessean*: [“How Tennessee can leverage its core strengths to become an economic powerhouse in America.”](#) Additionally, you can find two recaps of the summit from [Vanderbilt University](#) and [Chancellor Plowman](#), and my May 2024 Forbes.com article, “People, Partnerships, And Place: A Recipe For Success In Tennessee” is [live](#).



Tennessee Governor Bill Lee



United States Senator Bill Hagerty (R-TN)



From left to right: Daniel Diermeier, Chancellor, Vanderbilt University; Deborah Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness; Donde Plowman, Chancellor, University of Tennessee, Knoxville



From left to right: Robert Carter, Executive Vice President, FedEx Information Services, and Chief Information Officer, FedEx Corporation; Pablo Di Si, President & CEO, Volkswagen Group of America, and CEO of Volkswagen Brand North American Region; Paolo Ferrari, BSAM Executive Chairman, Bridgestone West CEO, and Bridgestone Corporation J GCOO; Jérémie Papin, Chairperson, Nissan Americas, and Member of the Global Executive Committee and Sr. Vice President, Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.; Dan Helfrich, Chair and CEO, Deloitte Consulting LLP, and Business Vice-Chair, Council on Competitiveness



From left to right: Ted Townsend, President & CEO, Greater Memphis Chamber; Indya Kincannon, Mayor, City of Knoxville; Chad Evans, Executive Vice President, Council on Competitiveness; Tim Kelly, Mayor, City of Chattanooga; Jamari Brown, Director of Economic and Community Development, Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County

From left to right: Joe Hoagland, Vice President of Enterprise Relations and Innovation, Tennessee Valley Authority; Jason Maynard, Executive Vice President, Oracle; Susan Hubbard, Deputy Laboratory Director for Science and Technology, Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Deb Crawford, Vice Chancellor for Research, Innovation, & Economic Development, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Lindsey Cox, Chief Executive Officer, Launch Tennessee



Front from left to right: Jérémie Papin, Chairperson, Nissan Americas, and Member of the Global Executive Committee and Sr. Vice President, Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.; Daniel Diermeier, Chancellor, Vanderbilt University; Donde Plowman, Chancellor, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Stephen Streiffer, Director, Oak Ridge National Laboratory; United States Senator Bill Hagerty (R-TN); Deborah Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness



From left to right: Chad Holliday, Co-Chair, Mission Possible Partnership, and Chair Emeritus, Council on Competitiveness; Stephen Streiffer, Director, Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Padma Raghavan, Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, Vanderbilt University; Katie Ottenweller, Southeast Lead for Energy Policy & Markets, Google; Jeff Lyash, President & CEO, Tennessee Valley Authority; Brent Baker, Vice President – Chief Customer and Innovation Officer, Nashville Electric Service



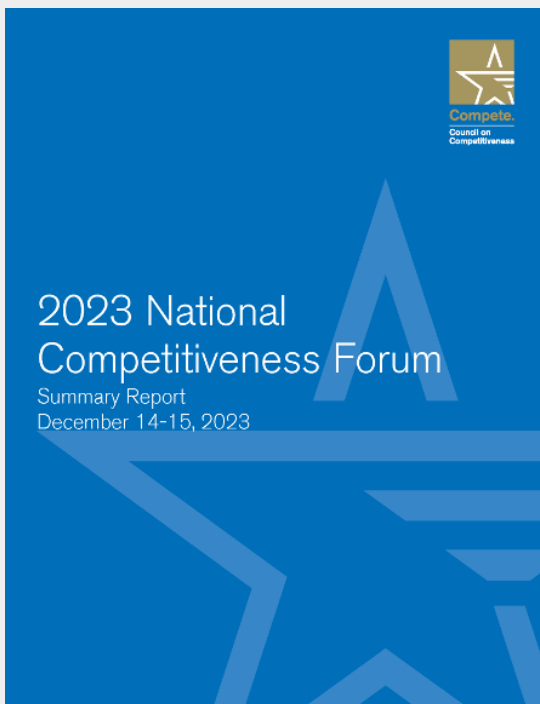
From left to right: Liliana Ramirez, Director of Workforce Development, Ford Motor Company; Deniece Thomas, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development; Jothany Reed, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Tennessee Board of Regents; Bill Hardgrave, President, University of Memphis; Joe Bales, Vice President for University Advancement, Middle Tennessee State University

From left to right: Donde Plowman, Chancellor, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Stuart McWhorter, Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development; Deborah Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness; Randy Boyd, President, University of Tennessee System; Daniel Diermeier, Chancellor, Vanderbilt University

Council News



**2023 National Competitiveness Forum
Summary Report Now Available**



In December 2023, the National Competitiveness Forum brought together over 250 members and community leaders across domains, from business and academia to labor and DOE National Laboratories. Together, they tackled the domestic and global competitiveness issues facing our nation and previewed the Council's 2024 agenda.

[Read the full summary report here.](#)

[Watch the YouTube videos of sessions here.](#)

Also, a social campaign featuring the excellent sessions is currently running across the Council's [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#) feeds.

Mountain West Competitiveness Conversation Registration Now Available



Registration is now open for the Council's "A Competitiveness Conversation in the Mountain West: Powering and Securing Innovation—Semiconductors, Clean Energy, Advanced Nuclear, and Cybersecurity." Running from August 6-8 in Boise, Idaho, under the leadership of Boise State President Marlene Tromp, Idaho National Laboratory Director John Wagner, and Council President & CEO Deborah Wince-Smith, this second edition of the "Competitiveness Conversations" will assemble leaders from across industry, government, research and higher education to examine how the Mountain West has emerged as a hub for innovation.

[Register and find out more here.](#)

Coming Soon! Be on the lookout for more information – and a registration site – for our third edition of the "Competitiveness Conversations" taking place September 9, 2024 on the campus of Purdue University in West LaFayette, Indiana. Focusing on "chips, qubits and molecules," this event – co-chaired by Purdue University President Mung Chiang, Argonne National Laboratory Director Paul Kearns, University of Illinois System Vice President for Economic Development

and Innovation Jay Walsh, and Council CEO Deborah Wince-Smith, will explore the new technologies that are shaping the future of the American economy.

Council President and CEO Deborah Wince-Smith Receives Honorary Doctorate From the European University of Tirana, Albania



Center Left: Ms. Joan Gabel, Chancellor, University of Pittsburgh, and Council on Competitiveness Academic Vice-chair

Center Right: The Honorable Deborah Wince-Smith, President & CEO, Council on Competitiveness

The European University of Tirana, Albania awarded an honorary doctorate to Council on Competitiveness President and CEO Deborah Wince-Smith. The citation references her work to improve competitiveness and to help shepherd Albanian stakeholders – and a newly formed Council on Competitiveness Albania – into the community of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils. In her acceptance address, Wince-Smith reflected on the potential impacts stemming from the emergence of new technologies like AI – as well as strategies to bolster Albanian competitiveness, like magnetizing local talent by creating more domestic opportunities.

The ceremony was preceded by University of Pittsburgh Chancellor and Council Academic Vice-chair Joan Gabel signing a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Pittsburgh and the European University of Tirana, further strengthening the connection in higher education between the two nations.

Council Community News

NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan and U.S. Senator Todd Young Join Purdue University President Mung Chiang to Celebrate \$100 million of Renovations at a Cleanroom Purdue's Discovery Park District

This April, Purdue started the first phase of a \$100 million renovation of the Birck Nanotechnology Center, a center focused on semiconductor research, in Discovery Park District at Purdue. The renovations will provide exciting new opportunities for students such as the creation of a training bay and the expansion of the Center's capabilities for quantum research. The investment in the Birck center lines up with the broader mission of the CHIPS and Science Act by promoting the development of America's semiconductor industry. With continued public-private partnerships such as this investment, the United States can continue to protect and create high quality jobs for its workforce. [Read more here](#), and learn more about the initiative at our September 9 Competitiveness Conversation held at Purdue University.

U.S. Senate Introduced Bipartisan Bill to Accelerate the Development of Nuclear Fusion Power Plants

Nuclear fusion could play a significant role in combating climate change, offering a clean energy source with minimal greenhouse gas emissions and reduced radioactive waste compared to fission. The proposed Fusion Energy Act would establish a specialized regulatory framework for fusion energy, separate from nuclear fission, to support its commercial growth. Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA) and John Cornyn (R-TX) emphasized the importance of clear regulatory authority and investment incentives for fusion energy. The bill's companion has already passed in the House of Representatives, with efforts underway to incorporate it into a broader nuclear package by congressional committees. [Read more here](#).

University of Michigan President Santa Ono Joins the United States-Japan Foundation Board of Trustees

As one of the closest allies and biggest trading partners with the United States, Japan is a strategic partner. One of the cornerstone organizations supporting that close bond is the United-States Japan Foundation, founded in 1980. In May, the Foundation's Board of Trustees invited University of Michigan President, Council Member, and National Commissioner, Santa Ono to become a member. In his role, he will be a part of the team awarding grants and engaging with a network of more than 500 fellows in both nations, helping to pave the way for the future of this critical relationship. [Read more here](#).

Argonne National Laboratory's Chicago STEM Opportunity Landscape Program Receives the C2ST Societal Impact Award

Too often, even in a vibrant urban area, many neighborhoods and people do not connect to STEM programs and opportunities. Argonne National Laboratory's Chicago STEM Opportunity Landscape Program is an effort to bring together STEM education and workforce training to the South Side of Chicago. The Chicago Council on Science and Technology (C2ST) has recognized these efforts, presenting the program with the Chicago Council's prestigious Societal Impact Award in recognition of its success and potential for change. [Read more here](#).

University of Tennessee, Knoxville Tapped to Create Ideal Pitches for

While the stars on the field tend to get the attention, the pitch on which they play is just as important for a successful soccer tournament. This month, FIFA officials announced that a University of Tennessee, Knoxville professor and team will lead a program to investigate the design, creation, and usage of the pitches for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Building a robust pitch for every game in the tournament will be a big responsibility, as the 2026 World Cup will span cities and stadiums in the United States, Mexico, and Canada. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville team's efforts are expected to provide valuable insight into pitch construction for years to come.

[Read more here.](#)

Argonne's Aurora Computer Becomes Second Exascale Machine While Oak Ridge's Frontier Maintains Top Spot

Argonne National Laboratory's Aurora supercomputer has officially become the world's second exascale machine, according to TOP500 biannual report on supercomputers. This puts it now in second place globally behind Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Frontier computer, which was the first to achieve the milestone. Aurora, which is still in the process of commissioning, is expected to surpass Frontier in terms of computing power once complete. With this advancement, the United States is now home to five of the ten most powerful computers in the world, including the top three, conveying a significant competitive edge. [Read more here.](#)

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo Announces New Strategic Vision for AI Safety and Cooperation

On May 21, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo released the strategic vision for the newly stood-up U.S. Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute (AIS). The vision outlines the AIS's goals, including advancing the science of AI safety, articulating and disseminating AI safety practices, and supporting institutions and coordination around AI safety. [Read more here.](#)

The National Science Foundation, Micron, and GlobalFoundries Partner to Invest in Semiconductor Workforce at Minority-Serving Institutions

The National Science Foundation, alongside semiconductor manufacturers Micron Technology and GlobalFoundries, announced in May a new initiative designed to enhance semiconductor and STEM education for educational institutions serving minority students. In doing so, the partners plan to bolster the high-tech, innovative workforce our country needs to succeed by expanding the talent pool of qualified workers. [Read more here.](#)

Council Insights

Startup Boom Signals Strengthening Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Presented in Partnership with Keybridge Research

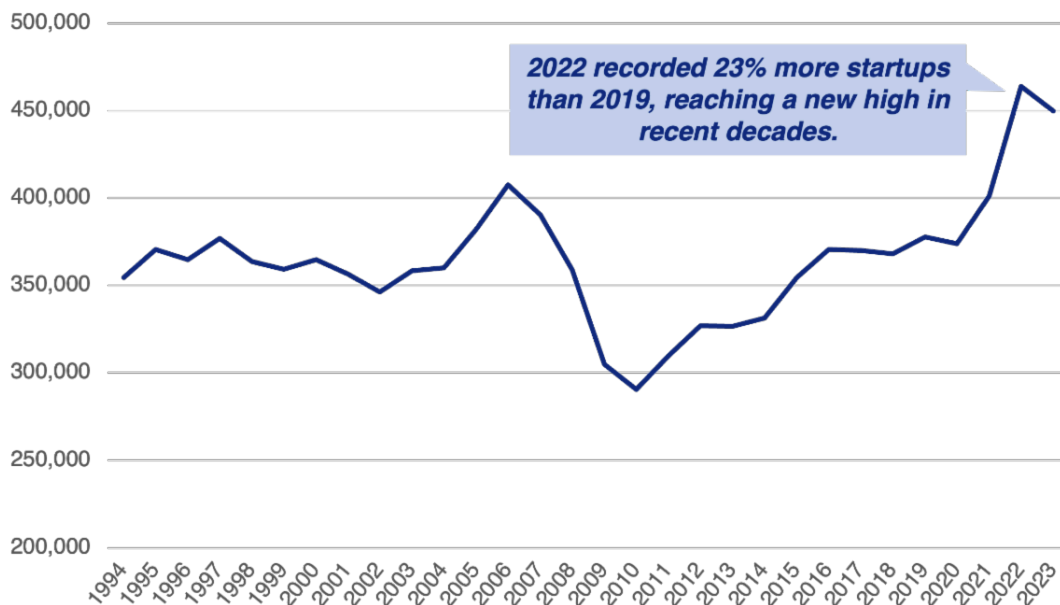
In the decade prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, American entrepreneurship lagged behind the historically high levels that many have come to expect. In 1982 about 38 percent of U.S. firms were less than five years old; by 2018, that share fell to 29 percent, with many start-ups concentrated in Silicon Valley and a few other innovation hubs. However, the pandemic has spurred a surge in American entrepreneurship in communities across the country.

In 2020 during the heart of the pandemic, Americans increasingly turned to entrepreneurship as they searched for new work and took advantage of demand for new niche products and services. This trend was expected to slow as businesses and offices re-opened, but startup rates continue to rise. According to Census data, in Q4 2023 entrepreneurs filed 450,000 likely employer applications, a 37 percent increase compared to Q4 2019. Startups, in part driven by rapid growth in the AI industry, also surged in 2022 and 2023—surpassing pre-Great Recession levels of startup activity.

A new feature of the current startup boom is a growing shift towards geographic and demographic diversity. Recent Brookings research show that Black and Hispanic families are increasingly turning to business ownership, at nearly twice the rates in 2019. Entrepreneurship activity is also taking place outside traditional centers of innovation, enabled in part by remote work flexibilities. Between 2019 and 2023, over 80 percent of U.S. counties experienced business growth. And smaller metro areas like Nashville, Provo, and Wichita have been identified as the “rising stars” of tech. Sustaining this entrepreneurial trend in communities across the country will be crucial for expanding and strengthening the U.S. innovation ecosystem.

Number of Startups Grows Rapidly in Recent Years

Annual number of new (less <1 year-old) establishments with 1-4 employees, 1994-2023



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Business Employment Dynamics, Table 3-A-F, May 2024.

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