



# Compete Connect

February 2026 Edition

## From the CEO's Desk



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

Dear Council on Competitiveness  
Community,

As we move deeper into 2026 — a milestone 40th year for the Council and as our nation approaches its 250th anniversary — the intensity of our agenda and activity is accelerating.

In the weeks ahead, the Council will convene two major editions of the Competitiveness Conversations Across America series — first in [Maryland](#) and then in [Nebraska](#) — each spotlighting the best and “next” practices of how places and people are building distinctive ecosystems to drive innovation, scale technology, and strengthen U.S. competitiveness.

- **Maryland (March 23-24):** With a focus on AI and quantum, this Conversation will explore how academic institutions, federal R&D labs, and national security initiatives intersect with a rapidly growing commercialization ecosystem. Over two days, nearly 60 speakers — including my cohosts President of the University of Maryland, College Park Darryll J. Pines and President of Morgan State University David K. Wilson, as well as Governor Wes Moore, U.S. Department of Energy Under Secretary for Science and Innovation and Director of the Genesis Mission Darío Gil, and many other leaders from industry, academia, and government — will share insights on how discoveries and talent are translated into new technologies, companies, and jobs across Maryland — offering a fascinating view of the U.S. innovation engine in action.

Attendance is complimentary. [Register for the Maryland Conversation here.](#)

- **Nebraska (April 29-30):** Spotighting the bioeconomy, this Conversation marks a key milestone in the Council's future of bioeconomy initiative (see the new report from our recent *Future of the Bioeconomy* dialogue [here](#)). In close collaboration with my cohost Dr. Jeffrey Gold, President of the University of Nebraska System, this Conversation will explore how research universities, industry, and policymakers are collaborating to scale biomanufacturing, strengthen supply chains, drive economic growth, and bolster national security. In Omaha, we will hear from Governor Jim Pillen, Omaha Mayor John Ewing, Congressman Mike Flood, U.S. Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Scott Hutchins, Gen. (Ret.) Anthony J. Cotton — former Commander of the United States Strategic Command, Gen. (Ret.) Paul A. Friedrichs — former Command Surgeon of the Joint Staff and Air Combat Command, Deputy Assistant to the President and Former Director of the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness, and more across industry and academia as we work to develop the roadmap for advancing the U.S. bioeconomy. Like the Maryland edition, the Nebraska Conversation is free to attend. [Register for the Nebraska Conversation here.](#)

Our team is also preparing for a San Diego edition of the Competitiveness Conversations, July 20–21. My co-host, the University of California San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla, will lead a powerful event focusing on the “San Diego stack” of innovation, spanning transformative computing, the future of fusion, agile aero, the future of bio, and more. In addition, the Technology Leadership and Strategy Initiative's first 2026 Dialogue will take place in June at Lockheed Martin's Fort Worth, Texas production facilities – with our follow-on Dialogue slated for November, just weeks before our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and 2026 National Competitiveness Forum (please save the dates December 16–17 in Washington, DC to join us).

And Council Chair, Erik Fyrwald, and I — along with other Board Members, the Executive Committee, and the National Commissioners — will be meeting in March and May to build out a series of compelling ideas, concepts, and actionable recommendations to support our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary platform – much more to come on that.

Please reach out to me or Council Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer [Chad Evans](#) should you have any questions about upcoming opportunities to engage with the Council. And speaking of Chad, I want to congratulate him on being invited to join the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's (NASEM) Executive Committee to support the future of the U.S. research enterprise.

I am also excited to welcome several new Members to the Council. Below, we highlight these additions, along with just a small sample of the extraordinary impact our Members have delivered over the past month.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Maryland and Nebraska — and to continuing this work together to ensure the United States does not simply participate in the next wave of innovation, but shapes and captures it.

Sincerely,

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

## Council News

### Join the Council in Maryland and Nebraska for Upcoming Competitiveness Conversations

#### Competitiveness Conversations Across America

#### Maryland—Unlocking American Innovation in the AI and Quantum Era



#### March 23: Morgan State University

Student Center Ballroom  
 1700 E. Cold Spring Lane  
 Baltimore, MD 21251



#### March 24: University of Maryland, College Park

The Hotel at The University of Maryland  
 7777 Baltimore Ave  
 College Park, MD 20740

Please join us for the [Maryland edition of the Council's Competitiveness Conversation Across America series](#), taking place March 23–24 across Morgan State University and the University of Maryland, College Park.

This two-day, two-campus Conversation will focus on the transformative power of AI and quantum technologies.

From Governor Wes Moore to MITRE CEO Mark Peters, Lockheed Martin CTO Craig Martel, and Undersecretary for Science and Innovation and Director of the Genesis Mission at the U.S. Department of Energy Darío Gil, we are bringing together leaders from industry, academia, labor, government, and frontier research enterprises to explore innovation, collaboration, and strategies for advancing U.S. competitiveness.

You can view the draft agenda, confirmed speakers, and other details on the Maryland Conversation [landing page](#). Registration is complimentary.

Register [HERE](#) for Maryland Competitiveness Conversation

## Competitiveness Conversations Across America

**Nebraska: Leading the New Frontier  
in the Global Bioeconomy**

**April 29–30, 2026**  
Omaha, NE

Join us for “[Nebraska: Leading the New Frontier in the Global Bioeconomy](#),” the April 29–30 edition of the Council’s Competitiveness Conversations Across America series. Co-hosts Dr. Jeffrey Gold, President of the University of Nebraska System, and the Hon. Deborah L. Wince-Smith will bring together an exceptional group of leaders from industry, academia, and government to explore emerging opportunities, cutting-edge innovations, and strategies to strengthen U.S. competitiveness in the global bioeconomy. Don’t miss this chance to engage with the ideas and people shaping the future of the field.

Additional details can be found on the Conversation's landing page [here](#), including a growing list of speakers, participants, and the draft agenda, featuring discussions on biomanufacturing, agricultural innovation, supply chains, talent pipelines, global competitiveness, and national security implications.

Register [HERE](#) for Nebraska Competitiveness Conversation

**The Future of the Bioeconomy | 2025 Executive Committee and National  
Commission Meeting Summary Report**

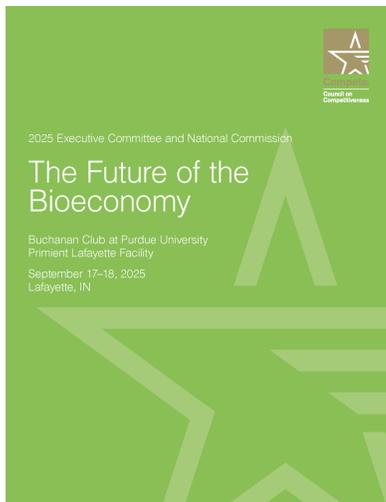


Photo credit (above): Primient

Last September, members of the Council’s Executive Committee and National Commission, together with other leaders from industry, academia, labor, and the national laboratories, came together at Primient in Lafayette, Indiana, for a substantive discussion on how the United States can lead in the global bioeconomy. Participants explored emerging technologies, policy priorities, and collaborative opportunities to accelerate innovation, strengthen supply chains, and unlock economic growth across the nation.

These insights offer important context for our upcoming Nebraska Competitiveness Conversation, where we will build on this discussion to identify actionable strategies and next steps for advancing U.S. leadership in the bioeconomy.

Read a full summary, featuring great photos of the meeting and key takeaway, [here](#).

**Deborah L. Wince-Smith February Forbes.com Article — "Inflection Points, Productivity, & Prosperity: U.S. Leadership @ 250"**

Forty years ago, the United States faced a competitiveness crisis. But our fast and decisive moves to harness a technological discontinuity — the Internet — changed our productivity and prosperity trajectory.

Today, the stakes are as high — if not higher. Multiple technology revolutions emerging and converging at unprecedented speed — coupled with China’s economic and security challenges — are creating intense turbulence.

Will America capture the ensuing productivity waves from this churn?

Read our latest piece on U.S. leadership potential as the nation turns 250 on [Forbes.com here.](#)



**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!** Join the Council in celebrating its 40th Anniversary, **December 16-17, 2026.** The annual dinner and National Competitiveness Forum will return to the Willard InterContinental.

## Council Community News

### Council Chair Erik Fyrwald Works to Scale the Bioeconomy for Competitiveness

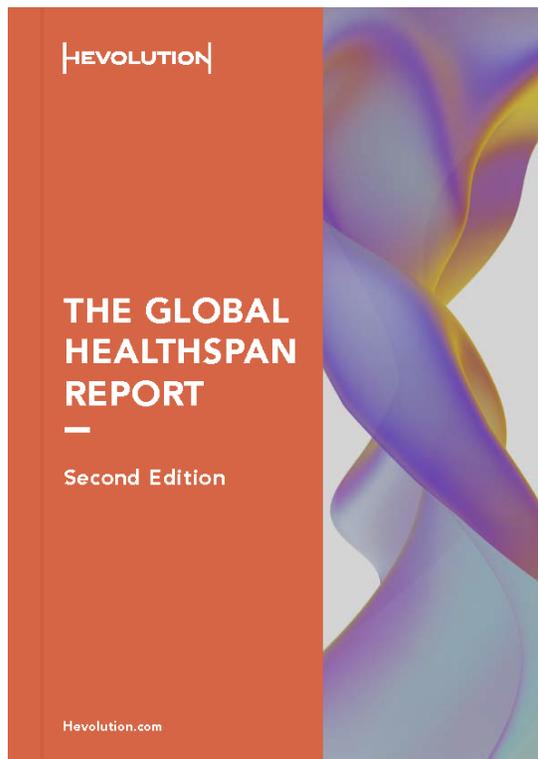


Photo Credit: IFF

In a recent interview, Council Chair Erik Fyrwald, CEO of IFF, highlighted how biosolutions are driving growth across agriculture, food, and consumer products — reducing energy, water use, and emissions while improving performance. But, aligning the regulatory systems with the pace of biological innovation will be critical to sustaining U.S. leadership in the bioeconomy. “Regulators need to ensure safety, but when products create clear benefits, they should move faster. There should be clear timelines and approval times,” he said.

See Erik’s full interview in Investment Reports [here](#) — and more to come on a special July 20th workshop (co-created by IFF, the Council and other partners) on “smart regulations and smart standards” for an era of transformative innovation in and across economic sectors – to precede the San Diego edition of the Competitiveness Conversations series.

## Hevolution Foundation Continues to Chart Healthspan Trends



The second edition of Hevolution Foundation’s *Global Healthspan Report* is out — and makes the case that the multi-generational workforce is becoming a global reality.

By 2050, the global population aged 65 and older will reach 1.6 billion. At that time, an unprecedented five generations will be working side by side.

This edition of the report also explores the economic implications of longer lives. As demographics shift, maintaining growth and living standards will depend on healthier years, sustained productivity, and systems designed for longer participation in the workforce. As the Foundation notes: “Healthspan is not only a health priority. It is becoming a defining economic variable.”

Explore the full report [here](#).

### **Pittsburgh Helps Build Momentum in the U.S. Bioeconomy**

Academic Vice-Chair Joan Gabel, Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, and Executive Committee Member Farnam Jahanian, President of Carnegie Mellon University, are guiding their universities' support for innovation, research, and workforce development to advance the U.S. bioeconomy. In February 2026, Commissioner Dov Zakheim of the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology (NSCEB) visited Pittsburgh as part of the Biotech Across America roadshow, touring AI-powered labs and biomanufacturing facilities to highlight the city's role in securing U.S. biotechnology supply chains.

### **U.S. Department of Energy Office of Science Stands up new Advisory Committee – Featuring Several Council Members**

The U.S. Department of Energy has launched the Office of Science Advisory Committee (SCAC) to provide independent guidance on complex scientific and technical priorities, including research programs, facilities, and opportunities for collaboration across national laboratories and industry.

Several Council leaders have been appointed to SCAC: Executive Committee Member Suresh Garimella, President of the University of Arizona; Council Member Edward Seidel, President of the University of Wyoming; and Former Council Member Eric Isaacs, President of the Research Corporation for Science Advancement, former Director of Argonne National Laboratory, and President-elect of AAAS.

Their expertise will help shape DOE's science agenda and advance U.S. leadership in research and innovation. Read the full announcement [here](#).

### **Council EVP Joining New Committee to Support the U.S. Research Enterprise**



The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) have invited Council EVP & COO Chad Evans to join a new Executive Committee to support the future of the U.S. research enterprise. The Committee — also known as the *GUIPRR Working Group on the Strategic Assessment of the U.S. Research Enterprise* — will bring together a group of leaders from industry, venture investment, academia, the federal and public sector, and the policy advocacy and philanthropic communities to examine how best to translate shared priorities into practical implementation frameworks for a modern, national research strategy.

Photo credit: Council on Competitiveness

## Competitiveness News

### **CIA Accelerates Innovation Partnerships**

Director of the CIA John Ratcliffe announced a new acquisition framework designed to streamline collaboration with U.S. commercial partners and accelerate the adoption of cutting-edge technologies. In alignment with the National Commission's [Competing in the Next Economy](#) report and the TLSI's [Compact for America](#) report, the reforms — including centralized vendor vetting and faster IT authorization — aim to significantly reduce the time between defining mission needs and deploying solutions. As the Director notes, this is a “radical shift toward a culture of speed, agility, and innovation,” which will better position the CIA to harness private-sector advances and meet rapidly evolving national security challenges.



This week, Feb. 22-28, the Council recognizes its members — and many stakeholders — who are the engineers bringing to life American imagination, insight, and ingenuity.

Learn more about National Engineers Week [here](#).

### **U.S. National Labs Are at the Forefront in Driving Progress in the Department of Energy's Genesis Mission**

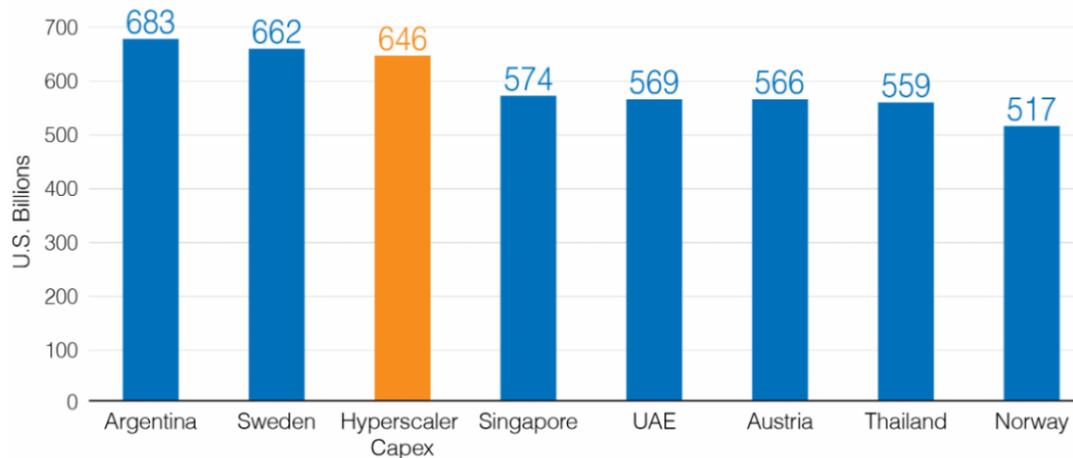
The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has announced 26 science and technology challenges of national importance to advance the Genesis Mission, a national initiative designed to accelerate innovation and discovery through artificial intelligence. Like all its sister labs, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) is working at the forefront of the challenges. For example, PNNL is deploying artificial intelligence to accelerate discovery across energy, national security, and the bioeconomy through the Orchestrated Platform for Autonomous Laboratories (OPAL) and the Anaerobic Microbial Phenotyping Platform (AMP2). Learn more about PNNL's efforts here on [PNNL's News Center](#). And learn how other National Laboratories are contributing to the Genesis Mission, [here](#).

## Council Insight

### **Hyperscalers: Companies or Small Nation States?**

## U.S. Hyperscaler Capex vs. Nominal GDP of Countries

Source: FactSet, World Bank, Macrobond, Apollo Chief Economist. Note: Hyperscaler companies include Oracle, Microsoft, Meta, Amazon, Google.



According to Apollo Global Management\* and others — like Bridgewater — hyperscalers (Oracle, Microsoft, Amazon, Meta, and Google) are poised to invest over \$600 billion in capital expenditures in 2026.

This level of investment is approaching 2 percent of U.S. gross domestic product — with the investment's share of GDP more than doubling since 2023 (and growing more than sixfold since 2016).

And by many metrics, hyperscalers are investing at levels once reserved for nation states. This year, hyperscaler capex is estimated to be:

1. Equivalent to the GDP for Singapore, Sweden, and Argentina.
2. Roughly two-thirds of U.S. annual defense spending — but is more than the combined military spending of Germany, France, UK, Japan, Italy, and Canada.

Other signs? The hyperscaler data center demands are now measured in gigawatts - comparable to the output of small and even mid-sized nations; and with multi-trillion-dollar market caps, these firms (plus others, like Nvidia and Apple) now rival the size of entire stock markets in nations like Belgium, Denmark, and Indonesia.

\* Source: "Putting the total amount of hyperscaler capex into perspective." Torsten Slock, Rajvi Shah, and Shruti Galwankar, Apollo Global Management, February 2026.

Help Shape the Future of Work: Take the Global Survey on Humans and AI



Coming out of the Pittsburgh 2025 “Competitiveness Conversation” and Global Innovation Summit, the Council’s sister organization - the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils - is launching an ambitious initiative to explore how humans and AI can "co-evolve."

Participate in our "Survey on Humans and AI" - and inform a multilateral Action Plan addressing the future of human capital, workforce readiness, ethics, security, productivity and economic growth, and prosperity.

[Take the survey here.](#)

## New to Our Community



**Dr. Sian Leah Beilock**  
President  
Dartmouth College

President Beilock joins the Council as a General Member

*Photo Credit: Dartmouth College*



**Dr. Laura A. Carlson**  
President  
University of Delaware

President Carlson joins the Council as a General Member

*Photo Credit: University of Delaware*



**Dr. Craig Martell**  
Vice President  
Chief Technology Officer  
Lockheed Martin Corporation

Dr. Martell joins the Council as an  
Executive Committee Member

*Photo Credit: Lockheed Martin Corporation*



**Dr. Brad L. Mortensen**  
President  
Utah State University

President Mortensen joins the Council  
as a General Member

*Photo Credit: Utah State University*

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