

## For Immediate Release

### Competitiveness Conversations Across America: Tennessee Hosts Dynamic Debut to Build Future Innovation Ecosystems

Nashville, Tennessee - April 25, 2024 – To maintain competitiveness in the evolving global economy, the United States must expand its innovation footprint. Recognizing this imperative, the Council on Competitiveness (Council) has unveiled under the auspices of its National Commission on Innovation a new series of regional summits branded "Competitiveness Conversations Across America." The inaugural Competitiveness Conversation, "[Tennessee – Redefining Place & Building the Future Innovation Ecosystem for Mobility, Energy & Manufacturing](#)," will take place April 25-26, 2024, at the Student Life Center Ballroom, Vanderbilt University, Nashville.

Council President and CEO Deborah Wince-Smith will co-host this first summit with Vanderbilt University Chancellor Daniel Diermeier and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Chancellor Donde Plowman. Additionally, a highly distinguished Steering Committee — comprising 16 innovation leaders that represent sectors across Tennessee and the nation, from business, higher education, America's national laboratory enterprise, government, and non-governmental organizations — has guided development of this summit.

Tennessee, with its success in building capabilities and attracting investments, in mobility, energy, and manufacturing, serves as a prime example of a state expanding its innovation prowess and potential. The inaugural Competitiveness Conversation will explore Tennessee's journey toward becoming a burgeoning innovation hub, where research, development, and deployment of new technologies is being coupled with advanced manufacturing, business and industry formation to create jobs and more inclusive prosperity.

By uncovering Tennessee's best practices, the Competitiveness Conversation will also help inform the Council's efforts to create a national framework innovation.

"With a \$20 trillion economy and a diverse population of over 330 million people, the United States is an incredible incubator of imagination, insight, ingenuity, invention, and impact — otherwise known as innovation. But today, we face a critical inflection point — one where we must urgently reinvent America and create and optimize innovation ecosystems in every community of our great country to compete in a world of unbelievable and mounting competition," said Council President and CEO Deborah Wince-Smith. "By bringing together the leaders from across Tennessee's innovation ecosystem, we will learn from the state, and weave both a tighter and more diverse national innovation system."

Over the two-day event, leaders will exchange ideas on building partnerships, overcoming challenges, and creating an innovation roadmap for Tennessee and across the country. Here is an overview of the agenda:

#### Day 1 Highlights (Thursday, April 25, 2024):

- 1:10 pm: "Putting Competitiveness in Context" - Hosts Daniel Diermeier, Donde Plowman, and Deborah L. Wince-Smith share insights on the policy vision for Competitiveness Conversations Across America.

- 1:30 pm: “The Pillars of Innovation” - Rob Carter, CIO of FedEx Corporation, Pablo Di Si, President & CEO of Volkswagen Group of America, Paolo Ferrari, Executive Chairman of Bridgestone Americas, and Jérémie Papin, Chairperson of Nissan Americas, will discuss innovation drivers — such as policies, partnerships, workforce development, and leveraging technological disruption for competitive advantage — and their implications for Tennessee and the nation. The session will be moderated by Dan Helfrich, President & CEO of Deloitte Consulting.
- 2:15 pm: "Redefining Place in the 21st Century" – This session explores strategies to expand Tennessee's innovation ecosystem. The panel features Jamari Brown, Director of Economic and Community Development for Nashville and Davidson County, Tim Kelly, Mayor of Chattanooga, Indya Kincannon, Mayor of Knoxville, and Ted Townsend, President & CEO of the Greater Memphis Chamber, in a session moderated by Chad Evans, EVP of the Council on Competitiveness.
- 3:15 pm: “Innovation Talks” spotlighting Tennessee's tech prowess, featuring projects like the I-24 MOTION Project and advancements in quantum information science.
- 3:45 pm: “Developing Tennessee’s Innovation Economy” – A discussion focused on the integration of multidisciplinary and multidomain partnerships that bridge research, development, and deployment, and how these collaborations have catalyzed the emergence of new technologies at scale in Tennessee. The panel includes Lindsey Cox, CEO of Launch Tennessee, Deb Crawford, Vice Chancellor at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Susan Hubbard, Deputy Laboratory Director at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Jason Maynard, EVP of Revenue Ops for Oracle, in a session moderated by Joe Hoagland, Vice President at Tennessee Valley Authority.

#### Day 2 Highlights (Friday, April 26, 2024):

- 8:40 am: "Powering Tennessee’s Future" – A discussion that explores creating and using an energy matrix to support growth across many industry sectors with Brent Baker, Chief Customer and Innovation Officer at Nashville Electric Service, Jeff Lyash, President and CEO of Tennessee Valley Authority, Katie Ottenweller, Southeast Lead of Energy Policy and Markets at Google, Padma Raghavan, Vice Provost at Vanderbilt University, and Stephen Streiffer, Director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory, in a session moderated Chad Holliday, Chair Emeritus of Royal Dutch Shell and the Council on Competitiveness, and Co-Chair of the Mission Possible Partnership.
- 9:30 am: “Innovation Talks” continue by highlighting Tennessee's energy and tech assets across the entire state.
- 10:00 am: "Taking Tennessee’s Talent to the Next Level" – A discussion around shaping strategies for building the most agile and resilient 21st century workforce with Joe Bales, Vice President for University Advancement at Middle Tennessee State University, Bill Hardgrave, President of the University of Memphis, Deniece Thomas, Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development, and Flora Tydings, Chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents, in a session moderated by Liliana Ramirez, Global Director of Workforce Development at Ford Motor Company.
- 11:00 am: “Tennessee Governor’s Address” – A keynote from Governor Bill Lee.

- 11:30 am: “Mapping the Enabling Conditions for Tennessee’s Competitiveness Strategy for the Next 25 Years” – A leadership panel that explores Tennessee’s strategic trajectory over the next 25 years. Featuring Randy Boyd, President of University of Tennessee System, Daniel Diermeier, Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, Stuart McWhorter, Commissioner of Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, and Donde Plowman, Chancellor of University of Tennessee, Knoxville, with moderator Deborah L. Wince-Smith, President and CEO of the Council on Competitiveness.

Attendees will have the opportunity to engage with experts, share insights, and collaborate on shaping the future of innovation and competitiveness in Tennessee and across the United States. For more information, including the detailed agenda, speaker list, steering committee, and registration details, visit the [Conversation landing page on Compete.org](#).

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### **About the Vanderbilt University**

Founded in 1873 as an institution that would “contribute to strengthening the ties that should exist between all sections of our common country,” Vanderbilt University is globally renowned for its transformative education and pathbreaking research. The university’s 10 schools reside on a parklike campus set in the heart of Nashville, Tennessee, contributing to a collaborative culture that empowers leaders of tomorrow and prizes free expression, open inquiry and civil discourse.

Top-ranked in both academics and financial aid, Vanderbilt offers an immersive residential undergraduate experience, with programs in the liberal arts and sciences, engineering, music, education and human development. The university also is home to nationally and internationally recognized graduate schools of law, education, business, medicine, nursing and divinity, and offers robust graduate-degree programs across a range of academic disciplines. Vanderbilt’s prominent alumni base includes Nobel Prize winners, members of Congress, governors, ambassadors, judges, admirals, CEOs, university presidents, physicians, attorneys, and professional sports figures.

Vanderbilt and the affiliated nonprofit Vanderbilt University Medical Center frequently engage in interdisciplinary collaborations to drive positive change across society at large. The two entities recently reached a combined total of more than \$1 billion in external research funding in a single year. This landmark achievement reflects the university’s deep commitment to expanding the global impact of its innovation and research as it increases opportunities for faculty, students and staff to pursue bold new ideas and discoveries.

### **About the University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, is the state’s flagship land-grant research institution. Founded in 1794, the university has a footprint that spans the entire state, including the main campus in Knoxville, the Space Institute in Tullahoma, and the UT Institute of Agriculture and its Extension offices in all 95 counties. UT serves Tennesseans through academic excellence, groundbreaking research, community investment, and industry partnerships—all powered by the Volunteer spirit of leadership and service. As the largest university in Tennessee, UT educates more than 36,000 students, including 27,000 undergraduates, and employs more than 1,700 full-time instructional faculty in 14 degree-granting schools and colleges and 900 programs of study. The university is known for its excellence in turfgrass science and management, nuclear engineering, supply chain management, information sciences,

accounting, printmaking, and theater, among other fields.

From state-of-the-art collaborative research facilities to partnerships with global industry leaders, UT is investing in research that tackles some of society's biggest challenges. From electric vehicles that weigh less and energy transmission grids that are more resilient to crops that are more nutrient-dense and playing fields that are safer for athletes, UT works alongside industry, government, community partners, and fellow universities on the discoveries and technologies that make a difference for people in Tennessee and beyond.

### **About Council on Competitiveness**

For nearly four decades, the Council on Competitiveness (Council) has championed a competitiveness agenda for the United States to attract investment and talent and spur the commercialization of new ideas. While the players may have changed since its founding in 1986, the mission remains as vital as ever — to enhance U.S. productivity and raise the standard of living for all Americans.

The members of the Council — CEOs, university presidents, labor leaders and national lab directors — represent a powerful, nonpartisan voice that sets aside politics and seeks results. By providing real-world perspective to policymakers, the Council's private sector network makes an impact on decision-making across a broad spectrum of issues — from the cutting-edge of science and technology, to the democratization of innovation, to the shift from energy weakness to strength that supports the growing renaissance in U.S. manufacturing. The Council firmly believes that with the right policies, the strengths and potential of the U.S. economy far outweigh the current challenges the nation faces on the path to higher growth and greater opportunity for all Americans.

*Note to Editors: Photos and bios of speakers available upon request.*