AI Insight Forum Remarks
Dr. Kofi Nyarko

Good afternoon. I am Dr. Kofi Nyarko, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. I am deeply honored to address this body, which is committed to unlocking the transformative potential of artificial intelligence while safeguarding our society from its potential pitfalls. As the Director of the Center for Equitable AI and Machine Learning Systems (CEAMLS) at Morgan State University, I am not here only as a representative of my institution but also as a voice for the broader community of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of AI.

I would like to start by commending the leaders who have convened these AI Insight Forums. But before we investigate methods to evaluate the way forward, developing an understanding of the technology, its dynamic and varied applications, and performance is of the utmost importance. To develop wise policies, you must grapple with the philosophical questions AI raises alongside the technical details. You must listen to the diverse voices shaping this technology and you must build bipartisan consensus to steer AI toward justice, empowerment, and human dignity.

Artificial intelligence, undoubtedly, holds the promise of revolutionizing virtually every facet of human existence. From healthcare to transportation, finance to national security, AI stands as a beacon of innovation, offering transformative solutions to age-old challenges. Yet, we are also acutely aware of the potential limitations and perils it carries. The rise of biased algorithms, privacy breaches, and questions surrounding the ethical use of AI are challenges that necessitate our collective attention and action.

We have already witnessed the dangers of biased AI. Applications in healthcare, finance, policing, and beyond have replicated and amplified inequities. Facial analysis software struggles to identify non-white faces accurately. Predictive policing systems disproportionately target minority neighborhoods. Automated recruitment tools exhibit gender discrimination. The list goes on.

These examples underscore why inclusive innovation must be central to the AI policy discussion. Which voices are shaping AI? Whose priorities guide its development? Who might be harmed? Who stands to benefit? Answering these questions will determine if AI narrows or widens social divides, which could impact the health of the nation in many ways. For example, ensuring equitable access to AI-driven services and addressing algorithmic bias through legislation could prevent disparities in access to healthcare, education, and more. Furthermore, irresponsible AI could lead to discriminatory practices in various sectors, including employment, finance, criminal justice, and healthcare, where AI algorithms play pivotal roles. The lack of regulations and oversight might undermine public trust in AI technologies, hindering their widespread adoption.

Moreover, without congressional guidance, marginalized communities may continue to face disproportionate harm, reinforcing systemic biases.

At CEAMLS, we ardently advocate for equitable AI—AI that is just, inclusive, and respects the dignity of all individuals, regardless of their background. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that the benefits of AI are distributed broadly and that the risks are mitigated, especially for marginalized communities. To this end, we emphasize three key principles: (1) Diversity and Inclusion in AI; (2) Ethical Frameworks; (3) Public-Private Partnerships.

The AI community should reflect the richness and diversity of our society. HBCUs, as centers of academic excellence and cultural diversity, are uniquely positioned to lead in cultivating the next generation of AI leaders from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds. Congress can support this vision by allocating funding for AI educational programs at HBCUs. Educational programs HBCUs provide substantial benefits to the United States as a whole. They serve as a critical source of diverse talent, enriching the nation's workforce with underrepresented minority graduates. By tailoring programs to community needs, HBCUs help bridge skills gaps, particularly in STEM fields, ensuring a competitive workforce. These institutions engage in research that tackles unique societal challenges, contribute to cultural preservation, and actively engage with their communities. HBCUs produce leaders across various sectors, reduce educational disparities, enhance global competitiveness, and play a pivotal role in advancing the nation's social, economic, and cultural fabric.

Ethical considerations must serve as the compass guiding AI development. Congress can help define clear ethical standards and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that AI systems uphold principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability. Collaboration with academic institutions, especially those with a focus on responsible AI, can be instrumental in shaping these frameworks.

Congress plays a pivotal role in fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government in the AI space. By incentivizing public-private partnerships, Congress can stimulate innovation, drive responsible AI adoption, and strengthen the nation's competitive edge in AI technologies.

Legislation is the linchpin upon which the ethical and equitable development of AI hinges. Congress has a unique opportunity to craft legislation that not only encourages innovation but also safeguards our societal values. Key legislative priorities should include: (1) Algorithmic Transparency, (2) Privacy Protection and (3) Education and Workforce Development.

Regarding algorithmic transparency, Congress can mandate transparency in AI algorithms to prevent inscrutable, biased decision-making. Transparent AI algorithms ensure accountability and bolster public trust. Similarly, as AI becomes more integrated into our daily lives, protecting personal data becomes paramount. Legislation should define stringent data protection standards

and offer individuals greater control over their data. Lastly, we must recognize that there is a talent gap among disadvantaged communities with respect to AI, which must be addressed. Congress can allocate resources to expand AI education and workforce development programs at HBCUs and other institutions, ensuring that a diverse workforce is prepared for the AI-driven future.

I would also like to share broader recommendations on how Congress can maximize the benefits of AI while mitigating risks:

- Support AI safety and robustness research - Alongside innovation, we need techniques to ensure AI systems align with human values and behave as intended. Investing in research on AI verification, validation, security, and control today will pay dividends tomorrow.
- Lead international collaboration - Pursue technical cooperation, ethics guidelines and governance norms through diplomatic channels. But be wary of simplistic calls to "win" an AI race against imagined opponents. Leadership in AI requires wisdom and cooperation as much as resources.
- Prepare society for transformation - Major societal transitions require public sector leadership. Provide resources for workers displaced by automation.
- Invest in digital infrastructure and literacy - Reform education and social programs for the AI era, ensuring AI drives prosperity across communities while securing global leadership in this space.
- Defend democratic values - Apply scrutiny to AI applications that can threaten civic discourse, privacy, freedom of association and human rights.
- Safeguard elections and self-determination - The right regulatory framework for AI can protect liberties while fostering innovation.

Congress should make AI legislative decisions collaboratively with entities possessing genuine expertise in AI ethics, equity, and responsible development, prioritizing input from academic institutions, research centers, and interdisciplinary experts, rather than relying solely on industry or lobbyists.

As we move forward with AI legislation, we must consider the global context. AI knows no borders, and international collaboration is imperative. Congress can facilitate international cooperation in AI research while safeguarding our national interests and maintaining American leadership in AI innovation. Research centers within academic institutions can serve as catalysts for AI innovation and education. Collaboration with Congress can amplify our collective impact. Hence, I encourage Congress to invest in dedicated AI Research Centers at HBCUs and other academic institutions to help accelerate AI innovation. I also urge Congress to promote interdisciplinary collaboration between AI researchers, ethicists, sociologists, and policymakers to foster well-rounded AI solutions. Furthermore, I encourage Congress to support public-private

initiatives that leverage the expertise of academia, industry, and government to address complex AI challenges.

In closing, I implore this forum to embrace the potential of AI while staying vigilant about its societal impacts. Academic research centers like CEAMLS, which are interdisciplinary by nature, are committed to advancing equitable, ethical, and innovative AI. We stand ready to partner with Congress to shape responsible AI legislation that benefits all Americans and positions our nation as a leader in this critical field.

Thank you for your attention, and I am eager to engage in discussions and answer any questions on how we can collaboratively achieve these shared objectives.