

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**RANKING MEMBER ROB PORTMAN**  
*PATHWAYS TO PROCUREMENT INNOVATION*  
MAY 12, 2022

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing regarding federal procurement improvements. Thank you as well to our witnesses here today, including Ms. Soraya Correa for her many years of service at the Department of Homeland Security. She served the Department from the inception of the agency and I congratulate her on her recent retirement.

The United States government spends a tremendous amount of taxpayer money each year on contracts for goods and services. We know in 2020, the U.S. government obligated \$665 billion dollars, a 50 percent increase from 2015. Some of this increase was due to the coronavirus pandemic, but not all of it. And we must wait and see what the contracting outcomes will be for this year as federal agencies, like all Americans, contend with skyrocketing inflation. Procurement officials also face other major challenges in the areas of cybersecurity and workforce training.

We must also do what we can to protect and maximize American jobs, and that starts by ensuring that our tax dollars spent on government procurement goods and services aren't used to create jobs overseas. I'm grateful that one area that remains bipartisan is the policy that when the government contracts for manufactured goods, those goods should be made in America. Buy American has been the law for nearly a century. Federal agencies, however, have recently granted too many waivers to Buy American. Under current law, federal agencies may use domestic content waivers to Buy American laws to purchase goods or services from foreign companies only in certain circumstances. For example, when an American-made good is unavailable or will significantly increase the cost of a product. Federal agencies, however, overuse this waiver authority and until recently, there was not an easily accessible, government-wide system tracking the use and abuse of these waivers.

I was pleased to see my bipartisan BuyAmerican.gov Act become law in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* and that the administration has issued an executive order creating the public website MadeinAmerica.gov to better identify contracting opportunities for American manufacturers. It mandates that any federal agency requesting a waiver to Made in America requirements to publicly submit it for everyone to see. There may be American manufacturers unknown to the government that can meet these needs. That transparency will help protect American workers and American jobs.

I also was pleased to work with Chairman Peters on the “Build America, Buy America” title of the recently passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. That title updated Buy America requirements to ensure all the money spent on infrastructure goes to American manufacturing and workers. We also included the Make PPE in America Act that requires personal protective equipment critical to respond to a public health crisis to be produced here at home. When I talked to PPE manufacturers about re-shoring this production to America, the number one thing I heard about was the need for stability through long-term contracts. The multi-year contracts as required in this legislation will give producers the certainty to know that their investment in the United States will be worth it because the government will be there to buy the personal protective equipment they produce.

Having passed all these laws, we might just say 2021 was the Year of Buy America. This committee should be proud of the work it’s done to strengthen these programs.

Again, I thank the witnesses for being here and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today on their ideas for improving federal procurement and making the government a smarter buyer on behalf of the American people.