

What I Learned as an AI Advisor in the U.S. Congress

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Special Advisor on AI, Oregon State University

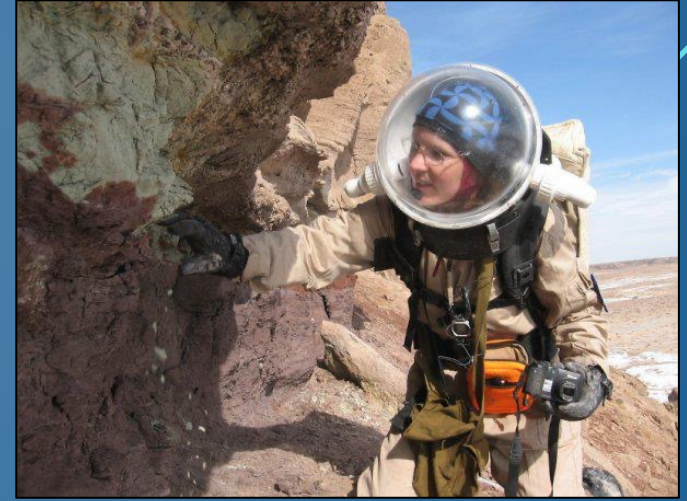
Fellow, Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI)

Brown Univ. AI Policy Summer School, July 23, 2025



Dr. Kiri Wagstaff

- Grew up in Castle Valley, UT
- Computer Science, AI, Machine Learning (Ph.D.)
 - Geology (M.S.), Library and Information Science (MLIS)
- NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (2003 – 2022)
 - Machine learning for space exploration
 - Mars rover operations (Opportunity rover)
- Oregon State University since 2019
("Machine Learning Challenges in the Real World",
Special Advisor on AI for the OSU Libraries)



Mars Desert Research Station



U.S. Congress

In 2023, I suddenly moved to Washington, D.C.

AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowship (STPF)

July 31, 2023

AAAS is seeking scientists and engineers from a wide range of disciplines who can contribute the expertise needed to support evidence-based policymaking germane to **artificial intelligence** in this next year. We are seeking professionals for this **AI Rapid Response STPF Cohort**, who could **apply by August 5th 2023** and **be ready to begin the program on September 1, 2023** in **Washington, DC**.

August 15, 2023: Panel interview (Zoom)

August 18, 2023: Job offer

August 30, 2023: Flight to D.C.

AAAS STPF “Rapid Response AI Cohort” 2023-2024

Eoghan Stafford
(Centre for the Governance
of AI, Ph.D. UCLA)

Soribel Feliz
(Microsoft, Meta,
Dept. of State)

Kiri Wagstaff
(NASA JPL, OSU,
Ph.D. Cornell)

Serena Booth
(UT Austin, Google,
Ph.D. MIT)

Rebecca Voglewede
(Nat'l Inst. on Deafness,
NIH, Ph.D. Tulane)



Cynthia Bailey
(Stanford Univ., Ph.D. UCSD)

What did I do inside the Senate?

- Provide technical analysis of proposed AI legislation
 - Plus NASA, commercial space, and aviation legislation
- Develop ideas for new AI legislation; forge bipartisan teams
- Meet with constituents, companies, and federal agencies to capture their priorities and concerns
- Provide staff training on use of AI within the office
- Learn how Congress gets things done



Congress worries about the same AI topics as everyone else

Safety

Bias

Deception

Copyright

Liability

Environmental
impacts

National
security

Education

Elections

What can Congress do about it?

Investigate and learn

- Hold hearings and investigations
- Direct studies by federal agencies

Legislate: provide direction

- Grant agency authority
- Direct development of standards
- Define procedures (e.g., licensing, certification)

Oversight

- Hold hearings and investigations
- Provide feedback to agencies
- Request Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports

Funding: establish the budget

- Appropriate funds for agencies
- Create “earmarks” for projects (outside of agencies)
- Levy taxes

Investigate and learn: Senate AI Insight Forums

- A new approach!
- Sept – Dec. 2023
- Instead of committee hearings with ~3 witnesses, convene 20+ diverse experts (industry, government, academia, think tanks, unions, civil society, military, venture capital)
- Nine Senate-wide events each focused on an AI-related topic: **Innovation**, **workforce**, **high impact areas**, **civil rights**, **elections**, **privacy and liability**, **explainability and copyright**, **risks and doomsday scenarios**, **national security**
- Senators and staff only



AI Forum outcome: Senate AI Policy Roadmap

- Bipartisan consensus on AI priorities for the Senate
 - Innovation: funding for AI R&D (e.g., NAIRR, AI Grand Challenges) and implementation (e.g., NIST, standards, testbeds, cybersecurity)
 - Workforce: training, immigration
 - Develop case-by-case requirements (explainability, testing, evaluation) on high-risk uses of AI
 - Elections: address deception, election security
 - ... and more



Federal AI legislation activity – 118th Congress

Status of Legislation	
Check all	
<input type="checkbox"/> Introduced	[341]
<input type="checkbox"/> Committee Consideration	[123]
<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Consideration	[30]
<input type="checkbox"/> Passed One Chamber	[26]
<input type="checkbox"/> Passed Both Chambers	[4]
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolving Differences	[4]
<input type="checkbox"/> To President	[3]
<input type="checkbox"/> Became Law	[3]

congress.gov

- National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)
 - Aerial refueling with AI (pilot program)
 - AI for Navy shipyard automation
 - DoD AI bug bounty program
 - Prize competition for AI watermarking
- FAA Reauthorization Act
 - AI/ML to improve airport efficiency and safety
 - AI/ML/simulation for air traffic controller training
- Fire Grants and Safety Act
 - Assessment of AI and ML methods to inform oversight and inspection decisions for nuclear reactors and materials

Federal AI legislation activity – 119th Congress

Status of Legislation		
Check all		
<input type="checkbox"/> Introduced		[155]
<input type="checkbox"/> Committee Consideration		[30]
<input type="checkbox"/> Floor Consideration		[16]
<input type="checkbox"/> Passed One Chamber		[15]
<input type="checkbox"/> Passed Both Chambers		[3]
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolving Differences		[1]
<input type="checkbox"/> To President		[3]
<input type="checkbox"/> Became Law		[3]

- **TAKE IT DOWN Act**
 - Prohibits online posting of non-consensual intimate images (real or AI-generated)
- **One Big Beautiful Bill Act**
 - \$150M for DoE to work on “transformational” AI models
 - \$1.4B for DoD use of AI:
 - \$450M for AI for shipbuilding
 - \$124M for AI for testing weapons
 - \$145M for “one-way attack unmanned aerial systems”
 - \$250M for the “AI ecosystem”
 - \$250M for AI Cyber Command
 - \$200M for AI to audit DoD financial statements
- **GENIUS Act** – regulates cryptocurrency (stablecoins)
 - Seek public comments on AI to detect money laundering

Legislating artificial intelligence

- Develop a list of ideas for AI-related legislation
- Get feedback and prioritization from Senator Kelly
- Develop and mature the ideas with a great team
- Let's zoom in on one of these...
 - Consumer AI Literacy



Lack of AI literacy gets us in trouble

Two US lawyers fined for submitting fake court citations from ChatGPT

Law firm also penalised after chatbot invented six legal cases that were then used in an aviation injury claim

“We made a good-faith mistake in failing to believe that a piece of technology could be making up cases out of whole cloth.”

Air Canada Has to Honor a Refund Policy Its Chatbot Made Up

The airline tried to argue that it shouldn't be liable for anything its chatbot says.

Kiri L. Wagstaff



Jun 19, 2024 9:59 AM

Hi Kiri!

I'm your PayPal Assistant and always here to help. I'm still in beta testing, so talking to you helps me learn.

I noticed that your recent transaction for 23.64 USD was declined. Can I help you get more information?

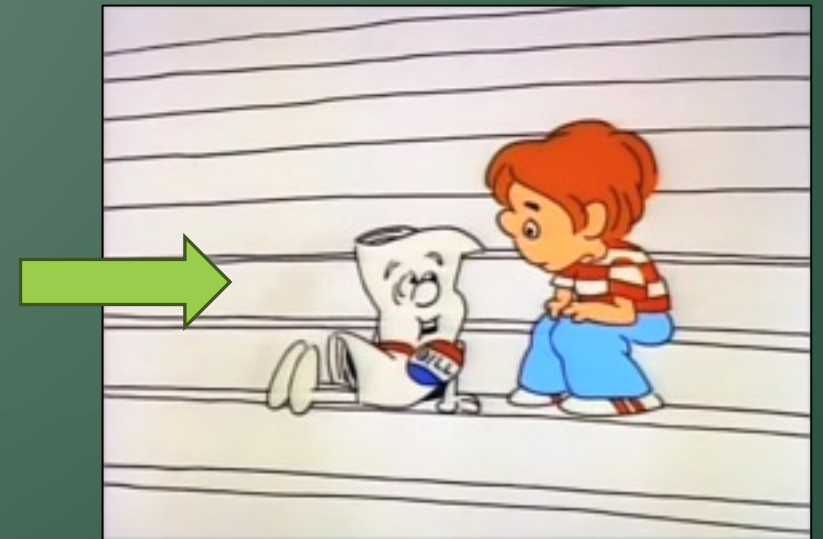
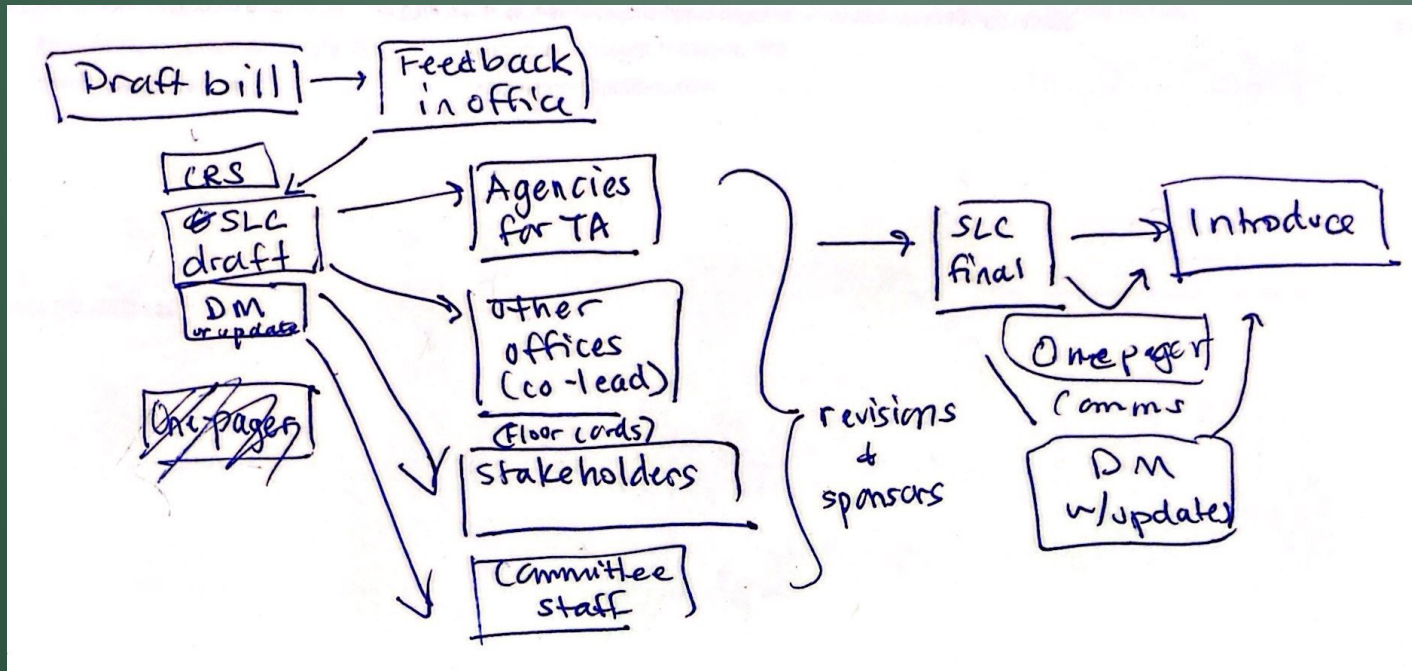
Finance demands facts, not creativity

July 23, 2025

13

Create a bill from a blank page

- I'd written research papers and proposals, but never a bill (law!)
- What are the steps? Is there a flowchart?



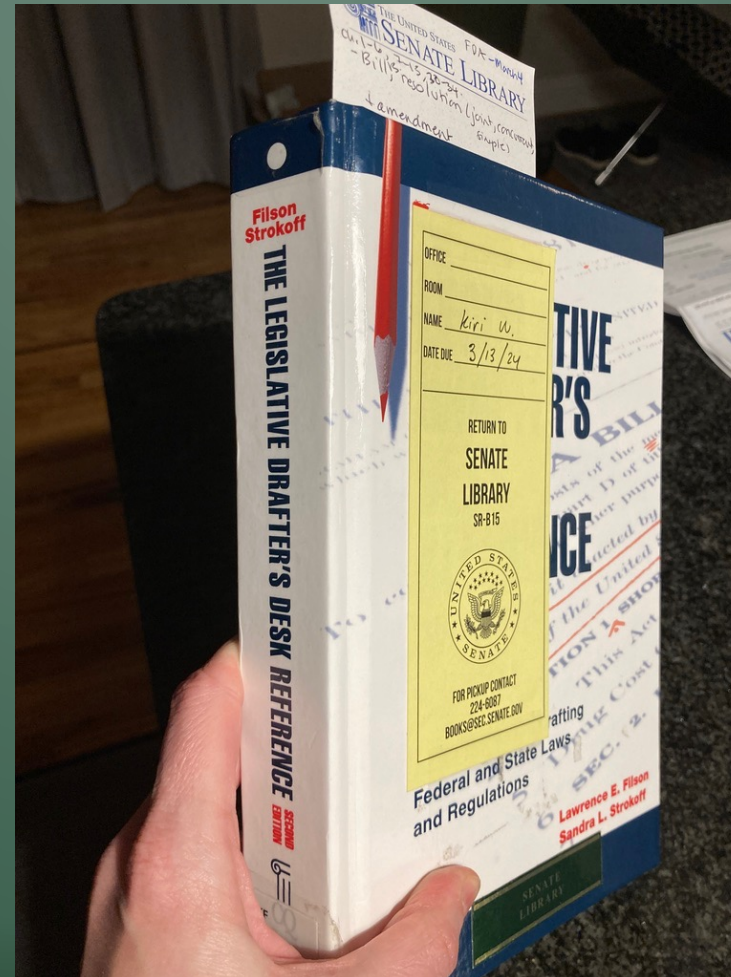
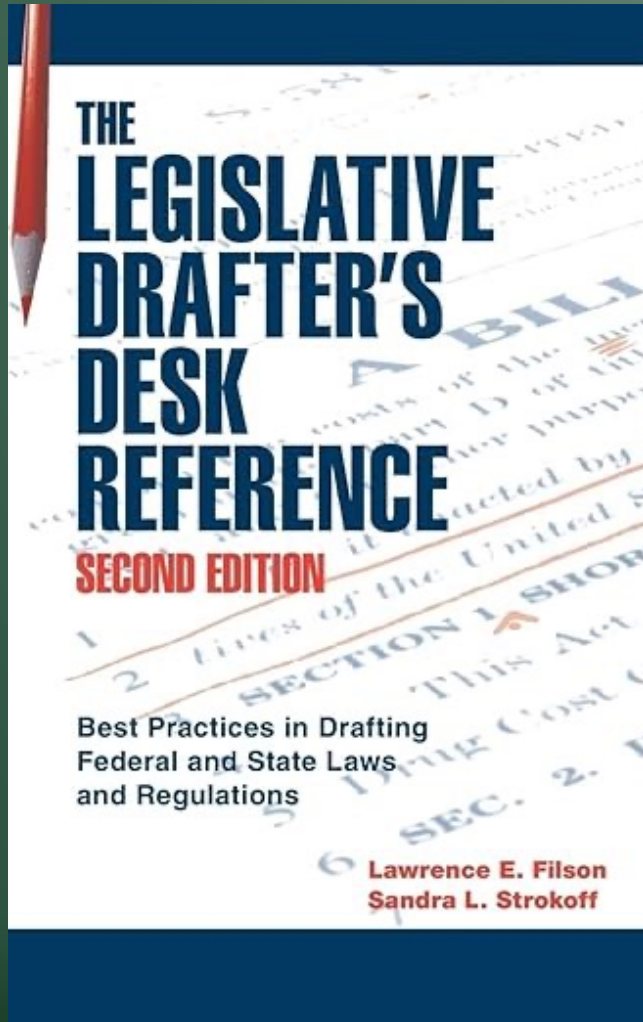
Schoolhouse Rock



Kiri L. Wagstaff



An indispensable guide



Consumers LEARN AI Act

Consumer **Literacy** and **Empowerment** to Advance Responsible Navigation of Artificial Intelligence Act

National strategy



Multilingual public campaign



Specific use cases

- Personal finance
- Healthcare recommendations
- Communication
- Creative works
- Business management

- AI capabilities and limitations
- Where AI is or can be used in daily life
- Best practices: data privacy, legal considerations, evading deception

... Like Financial Literacy campaigns

- Financial Literacy and Education Commission (est. 2003)



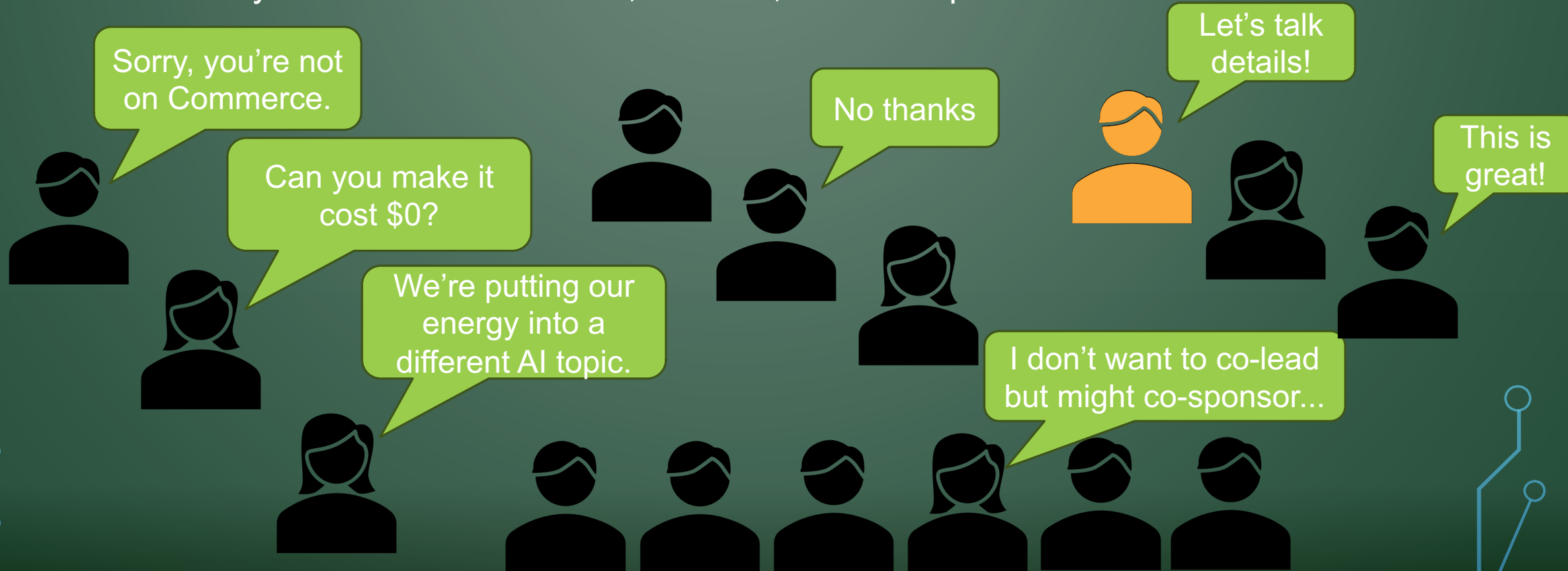
- consumer.gov
(No AI content)

Get the basics on how to make a budget, use credit, avoid scams, and more

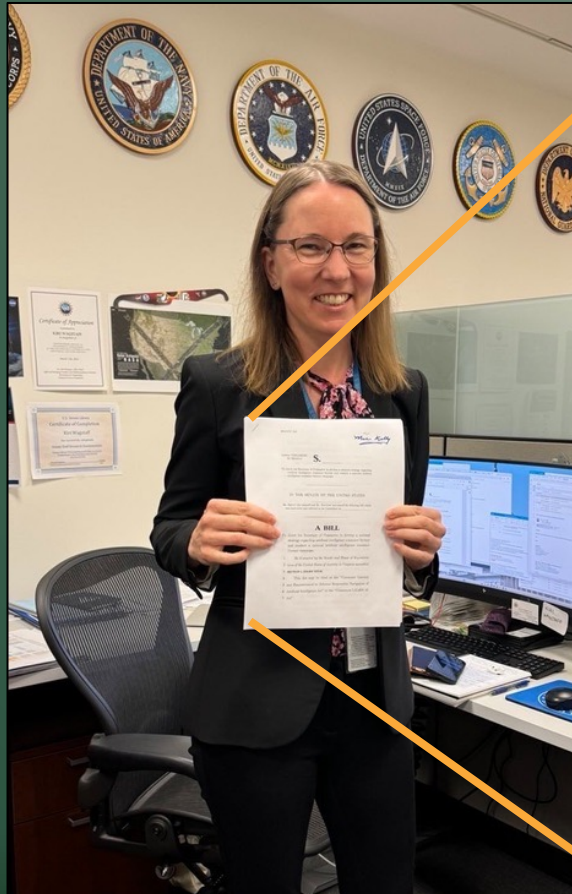


The bipartisan quest

- Goal: Find a Republican partner to co-lead the bill
 - Ideally one on the Commerce, Science, and Transportation committee



Senators Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and Mike Rounds (R-SD) introduced the bill on July 30, 2024



Kiri L. Wagstaff

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. _____

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to develop a national strategy regarding artificial intelligence consumer literacy and conduct a national artificial intelligence consumer literacy campaign.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. KELLY (for himself and Mr. ROUNDS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Commerce to develop a national strategy regarding artificial intelligence consumer literacy and conduct a national artificial intelligence consumer literacy campaign.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Consumer Literacy
5 and Empowerment to Advance Responsible Navigation of
6 Artificial Intelligence Act” or the “Consumers LEARN AI
7 Act”.



Next steps

- Commerce committee consideration
- House companion bill (Sept. 19)
- Re-introduce in the 119th Congress

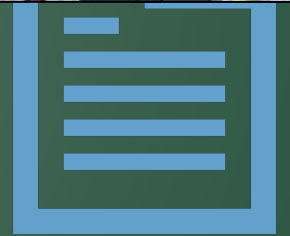
119th Congress: The bill is back (May 8, 2025)

S.1699: Artificial Intelligence Public Awareness and Education Campaign Act

- Sens. Young (R-IN), Schatz (D-HI), Rounds (R-SD), and Kelly (D-AZ)
- Hybrid of the 2024 Consumers LEARN AI Act (S.4838) + a 1-year AI literacy campaign bill from 2024 by Sens. Young & Schatz (S.4596)
- 5-year public AI literacy campaign led by the Department of Commerce with NIST and NTIA (with use cases)
- No national strategy
- No funds are appropriated
- Now waiting on the Commerce committee



S.4838



S.4596



S.1699

July 23, 2025

20

Thanks to:



Senator Mark Kelly



Katie Campbell –
Legislative Director



Mayra Salinas –
General Counsel



Joe Russell –
Legislative Assistant



Sydney Hess –
Legislative Aide

- and every other member of Senator Kelly's office

OSU AI Literacy Center

- Director: Laurie Bridges, Librarian & Professor
- Partnership between OSU Libraries and Center for Teaching and Learning
- Goal: help students, faculty, and staff understand opportunities and risks that come with using AI tools or AI-generated content



What can you do to share your AI expertise?

- What AI issues are being overlooked? Overhyped?
- What kind of investigation, legislation, oversight, or funding would help?
- ICML has a Position Paper track – submit your ideas
 - Prof. Booth just published here!
“Position: Strong Consumer Protection is an Inalienable Defense for AI Safety in the United States”
- Write a one-page policy brief. Ideally, deliver it in person.
 - Contact your senators and representatives – they want to hear from you
- Subscribe to congress.gov alerts for AI/topics of interest, individual bills
- Engineers and Scientists Acting Locally (ESAL)



Engineers & Scientists
Acting Locally (ESAL)

Discover and track AI legislation

The screenshot shows the CONGRESS.GOV Advanced Searches interface. At the top, there are links for 'Search Tools', 'Support', and a 'Sign In' button circled in red. Below the navigation bar, a search bar contains 'artificial intelligence' and a 'Search Within' dropdown. A 'MORE OPTIONS' button is also present. Below the search bar, there are links for 'Save this Search' and 'Download Results', and a row of icons for 'Citation', 'Subscribe', 'Share/Save', and 'Site Feedback'. The 'Refined by' section shows filters for 'artificial intelligence', '119 (2025-2026)', 'Legislation', and 'Bills (H.R. or S.)'. Below this, there are buttons for 'Hide Filters' and 'Hide Tracker', and a pagination bar showing '1-100 of 155' results, '100 per page', and '1 of 2' pages. The 'Sort by' dropdown is set to 'Relevancy', and the 'View' dropdown is set to 'Expand'. On the left side, there are two filter sections: 'Limit Your Search' and 'Congress'. The 'Limit Your Search' section has a red circle around the 'Legislation' checkbox, which is checked, and a count of '[155]'. The 'Congress' section has a 'Check all' link and two checkboxes: '119 (2025-2026)' (checked, [155]) and '118 (2023-2024)' (unchecked, [392]). Below these, there is a 'Show more' link. The 'Chamber of Origin' section has two checkboxes: 'House' ([83]) and 'Senate' ([72]). The main content area displays two bills. The first bill is 'H.R.334' — 119th Congress (2025-2026), titled 'To amend the Communications Act of 1934 to establish technical and procedural standards for artificial or prerecorded voice systems created through generative artificial intelligence, and for other purposes.' It lists the sponsor as 'Allen, Rick W. [Rep.-R-GA-12]' and the cosponsors as '(0)'. It also lists the committee as 'House - Energy and Commerce' and the latest action as 'House - 01/13/2025 Referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.' The tracker shows 'Introduced' as the current status. The second bill is 'H.R.1694' — 119th Congress (2025-2026), titled 'AI Accountability Act'. It lists the sponsor as 'Harder, Josh [Rep.-D-CA-9]' and the cosponsors as '(1)'. It also lists the committee as 'House - Energy and Commerce' and the latest action as 'House - 02/27/2025 Referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.' The tracker shows 'Introduced' as the current status.

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Refined by: "artificial intelligence" | 119 (2025-2026) | Legislation | Bills (H.R. or S.)

Hide Filters | Hide Tracker | 1-100 of 155 | 100 per page | 1 of 2 | Sort by Relevancy | View Expand

Limit Your Search

Uncheck all

☒ Legislation [155]

Congress

Check all

☒ 119 (2025-2026) [155]

☐ 118 (2023-2024) [392]

Show more

Chamber of Origin

House [83]

Senate [72]

BILL

1. [H.R.334](#) — 119th Congress (2025-2026)

To amend the Communications Act of 1934 to establish technical and procedural standards for artificial or prerecorded voice systems created through generative artificial intelligence, and for other purposes.

Sponsor: [Allen, Rick W. \[Rep.-R-GA-12\]](#) (Introduced 01/13/2025) Cosponsors: (0)

Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

Latest Action: House - 01/13/2025 Referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. ([All Actions](#))

Tracker: **Introduced** > Passed House > Passed Senate > To President > Became Law

BILL

2. [H.R.1694](#) — 119th Congress (2025-2026)

AI Accountability Act

Sponsor: [Harder, Josh \[Rep.-D-CA-9\]](#) (Introduced 02/27/2025) Cosponsors: (1)

Committees: House - Energy and Commerce

Latest Action: House - 02/27/2025 Referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. ([All Actions](#))

Tracker: **Introduced** > Passed House > Passed Senate > To President > Became Law

Make an account to sign up for alerts on saved searches, individual bills, etc.

155 bills

Summary – Congress and AI

- Congress is hungry for technical expertise
 - 36 AAAS congressional fellows for ~90 openings
 - Congress wants to get things right
 - AI literacy is a priority
- Congress on the inside isn't what you see in the media
 - Daily hard work, research, negotiation, desire to make the world a better place
 - Vs. sensationalism, scandals, sound bites, personalities
- Individual voices (yours!) can have large influence

Thank you!

Resources for you: <https://www.wkiri.com/AIpolicy>

Contact: wkiri@wkiri.com

