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CO-FOUNDER
TORCH TECHNOLOGIES
HUNTSVILLE, AL**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR
AND PENSIONS**

**HEARING ON “EMPOWERING WORKERS BY EXPANDING EMPLOYEE
OWNERSHIP”**

JULY 24, 2025

Testimony of Bill Roark, Co-founder of Torch Technologies

Chairman Cassidy, Ranking Member Sanders, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to share my experience as a cofounder of Torch Technologies and the profound impact employee ownership has had on our company. I appreciate your efforts to spotlight ESOPs and legislation that can help sustain and grow existing employee-owned companies, while encouraging more businesses to adopt this model.

My name is Bill Roark, and I live in Huntsville, Alabama. My journey began over 30 years ago as a young engineer and executive with a defense contractor. In 2002, I co-founded Torch Technologies with Don Holder after I was laid off from Nichols Research Corporation, following its acquisition by a larger company. To prevent this from happening to our employees, we decided to establish Torch as an employee-owned company from the outset, implementing an ESOP that would allow us to exit without selling the company.

From day one, every employee had the opportunity to buy stock. Then we established the ESOP in 2004 and became 100% ESOP-owned by the end of 2011, fulfilling a commitment we made to our employees on a cocktail napkin in a local diner. This ownership model has been a driving force behind our rapid growth; today, we are ranked #57 on the Washington Technology 'Top 100 Government Contractors' list.

Torch is a mid-tier Defense contractor headquartered in Huntsville, strategically located to support Redstone Arsenal. Our current annual revenue exceeds \$800M. Over 1,100 of our employees are in Huntsville, contributing to numerous military programs. We also have significant presences in Shalimar, FL; Colorado Springs, CO; Dayton, OH; Waltham, MA; Montgomery, AL; San Antonio, TX; Sterling Heights, MI; and Lawton, OK. We support multiple military bases and commands in more than 20 states and overseas.

Our employees play crucial roles in advancing state-of-the-art capabilities for our warfighters by delivering superior research, development, and engineering services and solutions. We continually invest in infrastructure to provide rapid prototyping of advanced capabilities, from concept development to fielding and sustainment.

The success of Torch can be attributed to our employee ownership model, which gives every employee a stake in the outcome and treats them as owners. We have recently certified as an Evergreen company, committing to remain in business for the next 100 years. Additionally, we have become a public benefit corporation, dedicated to the financial success of our employees, outstanding service to our nation's defense, and support for the communities where we operate. We are also committed to helping other businesses transition to employee ownership.

My book, *Built with Purpose*, details this journey and my commitment to building companies where employees can thrive, retire with dignity, and find lasting purpose in their work. This passion led me to serve on the Board of the Employee-owned S Corporations of America (ESCA). Through ESCA, Torch's leadership has connected with numerous companies that share similar stories. Research from ESCA shows that since Congress created S ESOPs 30 years ago, there have been significant increases in worker savings, wealth and wage equality, job stability, and national economic benefits.

We applaud Chairman Cassidy's legislation aimed at reducing tax code barriers to retirement savings and providing ESOPs with a voice on the ERISA Advisory Council. We also thank Senator Sanders for his long-term efforts to grow the community of ESOP companies through financing assistance and encouraging the Department of Labor to support, rather than discourage, ESOPs through the Employee Ownership Initiative program.

Torch supports ESCA's bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Senators Daines and Hassan, which would encourage more employee ownership by providing incentives for S corporation business owners to sell to an ESOP or be acquired by an S ESOP company when transitioning out of their business. This initiative would allow more American workers to enjoy the benefits and meaningful retirement savings that we at Torch have experienced through employee ownership.

We would appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with Committee leaders to communicate to policy leaders in the White House the vital importance of employee ownership. Creating platforms, such as last year's White House Convening on Worker Ownership, can further promote this initiative.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, thank you for allowing me to share Torch's story and my own. I urge your consideration and support for bipartisan legislation that will enable more hardworking Americans to share in the American Dream. Lets, keep the dream alive.