A Chief Public Officer for AI

The problem. A handful of private companies are making decisions that will shape work, school, medicine, money, and politics — what AI is allowed to do, and what it does to us. Nobody in those rooms works for the public. Rules written from outside face a trade between speed and depth: they can move fast or look closely, not both, and the technology changes in weeks.

The proposal. One representative of the public inside every major AI company.

- **Appointed by and accountable to the government**, not hired by the company.
- **Real access:** strategy meetings, product reviews, research, and testing as it happens.
- **A real staff**, sized to the company — not one person in a building of thousands.
- **A voice at every stage**, and a record of it: the officer keeps records, gives the back story to any inquiry, raises concerns with the agency, and in egregious cases makes findings public.
- **No veto.** The company still decides, builds, and takes its risks.
- **Independent even if company-funded:** federal pay schedule, no stock-linked pay, a multi-year revolving-door ban, a government reporting line.

No veto. A voice at every stage.

Three hard questions.

If they can't stop anything, what's the point? Presence is a different axis from authority. The officer is in the room while the choice is made, answers to the public rather than the company, and has somewhere to take a bad answer.

Won't it slow innovation? There's no veto: the company still sets its strategy, builds its products, and takes its risks. A public officer in the room is iron to steel: stronger, and lighter. It replaces the in-house responsibility layer, not legal compliance — and lets the company focus on building.

Why not do it in-house? These are values questions with no objective answer; an internal team has no standing to decide them for the public. And the stakes — and the race — are beyond what audit committees have ever survived.

Why now. Congress is deciding who governs AI, and the debate is about which government regulates from outside. Nobody is arguing for someone on the inside. Before the rules are written, this is an intervention; after, it is commentary.