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## National Semi chief blasts politicians' tech inertia

[Brian Fuller](#)

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SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — In what sounded suspiciously like a stump speech, National Semiconductor Corp. CEO Brian Halla Monday (March 12) blasted U.S. politicians for ignoring technology issues and, in doing so, putting the country at risk.

"Every issue is a technology issue," [Halla](#) said in a keynote speech kicking off the annual [Semico Research Summit](#) here. "Do not vote for any politicians who do not understand how important technology is to the future of this nation."

Halla, who has held leadership positions with the Semiconductor Industry Association and the World Semiconductor Council, said much talk has emerged in the past two years about the issue of American competitiveness. Democrats picked up on it and launched the [Innovation Agenda](#), Republicans launched [Protect America's Competitive Edge \(Pace\)](#), and President Bush talked of the [American Competitiveness Initiative](#) in last year's State of the Union Address.

"How much of that got done? Zero. Nothing," Halla said. "Why is this? Technology is, as far as our politicians are concerned, a God-given right—'That's what you people on the West Coast and Boston are concerned about; we [in Washington] have to worry about farmers and jobs being stolen by H1-B visas.' "

Halla, who grew up in Fort Dodge, Iowa, recalled watching the Soviet Sputnik satellite drift across the prairie as his neighbors sat on the lawn and ate popcorn. That challenge mobilized the United States. Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson launched a series of science initiatives, of which Kennedy's "man on the moon" challenge is the most famous.

Meanwhile, an army of immigrants—from [Wernher von Braun](#) through Intel's Andy Grove and [Google](#) founder Sergey Brin—has helped innovate technology in America, Halla noted.

"We have a lot of contributions from people who today would be sent home—sorry, no H1-B visas," Halla said. "Politicians think these people are stealing jobs."

Unlike like most high-tech keynotes, Halla's speech had the feel of a political speech. Asked afterward whether he was signaling a run for office, he quipped, "I would, except for my checkered past."

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