By Sheldon H. Jacobson

President Joe Biden put forward a “Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights” that provides five guiding principles for the development and implementation of artificial intelligence. They outline aspirational goals that also align with principles in the Democratic Party platform.

Technology leaders have also expressed concern about the untethered growth of AI and its impact on society, including its effect on work and the spread of misinformation. Looking to the 2024 election, now less than a year and a half away, generative AI has the potential to upend campaigns by swaying and manipulating voters. A classified Senate hearing was recently held to discuss the future of AI and the opportunities and risks it poses.

Though many of the points that Biden and technology leaders have raised are worthy of discussion, the challenge of creating guidelines to reign in AI is that they are inherently unenforceable and may ultimately do more harm than good. AI is already ubiquitous, and its pathway will grow only more expensive. Countries around the world are making large investments in AI, given its potential to accelerate economic growth, with the United States at the top of the list.

AI is not just affecting television shows, with few left untouched. Some people may believe that AI systems will simply take over the roles of, for example, pilots or secretaries. This overlooks the potential for AI systems to be more effective at playing chess. AI developments and advances are being made in industrial labs such as Google Research and in academia. What drives many of these advances is curiosity and ambition. Numerous government agencies, such as the National Science Foundation and the Department of Defense, are making substantial investments to push the boundaries of knowledge.

Considering the investments and attention, asking for restraint or a pause is futile, with many guidelines created unenforceable and likely to be ignored by most stakeholders. There is far too much intellectual energy being expended, far too much money at stake and far too much global competition to stop the growth and proliferation of AI systems.

While there is plenty of buzz about the opportunities AI presents, what of the concerns? A major issue many have raised, one in which the line between AI and politics gets muddled, is the potential for bias. Bias is an inherently human feature that is learned. AI often takes the form of what is known as “unintentional” or “unintentional.” Some people want AI to be “cleared” of this data that informs AI systems. In essence, biases based on politics, socioeconomic, education and other factors will be present in data used to train AI systems. Any manipulation of such data inherently changes the output from AI systems, which is akin to changing society through data.

This is why any proposed guidelines for AI should be crafted by a bipartisan committee; the full spectrum of viewpoints on bias needs to be considered. Engendering trust in the process will make it more likely that any guidelines will provide meaningful information and be taken seriously.

AI is going to affect the future of our nation. No pauses or restraints have the power to stop AI advances. Unfortunately, any positive innovations and benefits will come with negative consequences and pushbacks. This situation is similar to how people benefit from the open communication offered by social media but also now accept the misinformation that it facilitates, even with the guardrails in place, some of which are now being relaxed or dismantled.

This is the price to be paid as AI continues to grow and expand its reach. There are certain to be many successes to keep hope alive, as well as hazards that provide perspective and keep expectations in check.

At this stage of AI development, the call for restraint, as well as introduced, is that they may be, are neither feasible nor enforceable.

Sheldon H. Jacobson is a professor of computer science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As a data scientist and operations researcher, he applies his expertise in data-driven, risk-based decision-making to evaluate and inform policy.