

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
“DOE’s Mounting Cleanup Costs: Billions in Environmental Liability and
Growing.”
May 1, 2019**

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair DeGette. I appreciate you holding this hearing about the growing environmental liabilities associated with the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) nuclear waste cleanup.

This subject is of enormous importance to the nation, and especially for local communities near contaminated sites, such as those at Hanford. We know all too well the issues that the Office of Environmental Management (EM) handles. The threat of potential environmental disaster and pollution persists in the minds of Oregonians and people throughout the Pacific Northwest. With 56 million gallons of Cold War era toxic nuclear waste sitting in corroding and leaking metal tanks, some of which were built to last just twenty years, Hanford is a worrisome neighbor and the federal government has not always been a trusted and reliable partner.

It also presents a difficult and complex challenge with a scale that's difficult to appreciate on paper. The Hanford site itself is nearly half the size of Rhode Island. In August of 2017, Secretary Perry and I went out to Hanford to get a firsthand look at the work being done to clean up the site. There is plenty left to do, but the end goal is to immobilize high-level nuclear waste into a glass material similar to this puck. This difficult work must be done as safely and efficiently as possible in a cost-effective way.

Cleaning up the waste at Hanford and at other sites across the nation is a top priority. Under my leadership last Congress, we made a bipartisan request that the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) examine the issue of performance management at the cleanup sites under the control of DOE Environmental Management—or EM.

EM is responsible for remediating the environmental contamination attributable to the nation's nuclear weapons program, including the cleanup of liquid nuclear tank waste, stabilization, and packaging of nuclear materials, and decommissioning and

decontaminating closed nuclear facilities. The financial costs of DOE's environmental liabilities are high -- in total, DOE's EM liabilities are \$377 billion dollars, with DOE's total environmental liabilities reaching almost \$500 billion dollars. These numbers increased by \$110 billion between fiscal year 2017 and 2018 due in large part to DOE recalculating the baseline costs for the Hanford site.

A few months ago, GAO issued our requested report, and found accountability to be lacking in key areas such as whether cleanup performance is cost-efficient and effective. According to the GAO, DOE and EM have not established classification requirements such that most cleanup activities would be treated as projects, subject to more stringent requirements, instead of operational activities. As a result, there are greater risks to cost overruns and schedule delays.

DOE spends roughly \$6 billion a year on cleanup, but we don't always have clear visibility into what that means in terms of completing the mission. EM reports on the amount of nuclear cleanup completed each year, but for that amount of money spent, how many radioactive

tanks should have been treated? How much soil and water should have been remediated? We don't have clear answers to these questions because, according to GAO, EM's performance measures for operations activities do not always provide a clear and reliable picture.

Although EM has undertaken several studies to address the growing costs in its cleanup program, GAO found that EM had not conducted a formal root cause analysis to identify the causes for the growth in its environmental liabilities.

These issues and others have been acknowledged by the Department, and EM has proposed or is exploring changes to allow for quicker and more cost-effective cleanup of the remaining sites. EM is pursuing an end state contracting model for several sites, and using a multi-faceted approach to addressing liabilities including the use of current cleanup technologies for waste composition and risk; updating key project lifecycle estimates; and providing transparency when it comes to liability data. I look forward to hearing more from the Department today on its actions and proposals.

Ultimately, however, true progress on the cleanup of the waste at Hanford and other sites requires a safe, secure, and permanent storage location for the waste. While this hearing should help get the cleanup efforts on a better track, Yucca Mountain is the cornerstone of the nation's nuclear waste disposal. We need to move forward in a bipartisan way to greatly improve the performance and effectiveness of the cleanup and build a durable solution at Yucca.

I welcome today's witnesses and thank them for their attention to these important issues.