

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy Hearing on “DOE Modernization: Advancing the
Economic and National Security Benefits of America’s Nuclear
Infrastructure”
February 6, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

This morning we will examine several issues associated with the future of our nation’s nuclear industry—the current domestic nuclear supply chain, international market opportunities, regulatory and policy matters, and what is necessary for developing and deploying future nuclear technologies.

The testimony and our discussion represent another step in our efforts to more appropriately align the Department of Energy’s missions, management, and priorities with the challenges facing our nation today.

At root today, is a question of our nation’s capabilities not only to propel nuclear innovation generally, but to ensure an infrastructure that is critical to our economic and our national security.

Today’s civilian nuclear industry was borne out of America’s national security imperatives from over 70 years ago. The first controlled nuclear reactions led to the Manhattan Project, which helped win World War II. The 1958 launch of the world’s first-nuclear powered submarine, the U.S.S. Nautilus, marked the birth of our nuclear navy and resulted in our subsequent naval dominance.

President Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace provided for peaceful, civilian use of nuclear technology, which remains the foundation of the nuclear industry in place today.

Since that time, the civilian nuclear industry and its related infrastructure have been intertwined with our national security needs—projecting U.S. safety and security practices the world over, ensuring engineering and scientific understanding to safeguard nuclear materials, and developing the economic and commercial relationships that ensure a more secure world.

To continue to harvest the economic and national security benefits associated with our domestic nuclear energy infrastructure, however, we must recognize the world looks different than it did at the birth of the nuclear age. Consequently, we must take steps to update the relevant policies. These policies must be forward looking to enable innovation and the development and deployment of new advanced nuclear technologies.

Oregon-based Nuscale is an example of one of those innovative nuclear companies. Nuscale's small modular reactor proposed design recently received approval for a significant milestone when the Nuclear Regulatory Commission signed off on the design's passive cooling system. This decision is a gamechanger for the regulatory framework and I applaud both NRC and NuScale on this breakthrough.

The Department of Energy's recent public-private partnership with NuScale helped enable these near-term successes. To unleash long-term innovation, DOE must capitalize and nurture its nuclear infrastructure, including research and test facilities, intellectual expertise, and institutional leadership. This foundation is critical to both economic and national security imperatives, but requires long-term program stewardship, in addition to the underlying statutory authority and direction.

Today's hearing continues the committee's ongoing review of DOE, but I should also note that it has been over 30 years since the Nuclear Regulatory Commission was last reauthorized. Congressmen Kinzinger and Doyle's legislation to improve NRC's efficiency and budgetary process is a good start and I appreciate their interest and leadership on this issue.

This morning's diverse witness panels will help inform our efforts to reinvigorate our nation's critical nuclear infrastructure and I look forward to the testimony.