

Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
“DOE Modernization: Legislation Addressing Development, Regulation, and
Competitiveness of Advanced Nuclear Energy Technologies”
May 22, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Today’s Energy Subcommittee legislative hearing represents an important component of our DOE modernization efforts.

The bills we will examine provide key ingredients to enhance a core national security and energy security mission of the Department, and of the nation: promoting the safe and peaceful use of nuclear technology.

When Congress first authorized the commercial application of atomic energy in 1954, it declared: the “development, use, and control of atomic energy shall be directed so as to promote world peace, improve the general welfare, increase the standard of living, and strengthen free competition in private enterprise.”

That policy remains as relevant today and as important as ever.

By any measure, atomic energy has already brought tremendous benefits to the nation; it has provided a baseload, emissions-free source of electricity that has powered homes and industry over the past half-century. It has provided an infrastructure for our national and international security—from the technologies and fuels for our nuclear navy to the safety and security for civilian nuclear power.

However, as everybody on this panel knows well, a confluence of factors—abundant natural gas, power market designs, economic and regulatory burdens—have inhibited the nation’s nuclear industry over the past decade.

The challenge confronting policymakers is how to preserve the beneficial use of atomic energy for future generations. Today’s thoughtful, targeted legislative proposals are a good start.

The bipartisan bill from Representatives Kinzinger and Doyle establishes reasonable and predictable timeframes for regulatory decisions so companies like Oregon-based Nuscale Power can develop business plans to commercialize new

nuclear technologies, while also protecting future consumers from unnecessarily high regulatory costs.

The many regulatory requirements imposed by the Federal government on special nuclear material are understandable due to the risk associated with unsecured radioactive sources, but these regulations present barriers to new market entrants. Congressman Flores' discussion draft will spur innovation by providing a solution to advanced nuclear fuel needs.

The bipartisan discussion draft from Committee Members Hudson and Peters and two Members of the Armed Services Committee, Congressmen Wilson and Norcross, will help identify specific national security applications to capture the benefits of transformational nuclear reactor designs. For example, Idaho National Laboratory's remote location and critical defense programs may be an ideal location to construct and operate a resilient nuclear reactor.

And lastly, Congressman Johnson's discussion draft will help reduce barriers to competition facing our domestic manufacturing, vendors, and nuclear service companies. This is a critical conversation for this Subcommittee and one we must not shy away from.

This morning's witnesses bring both extensive experience in public service and business acumen.

I welcome Dr. Brent Park, the recently confirmed Deputy Administrator for Defense Nonproliferation at the National Nuclear Security Administration. Dr. Park is responsible for overseeing critical national security programs that keep America safe. Dr. Park is joined on the first panel by Ed McGinnis from DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy.

The second panel this morning includes Melissa Mann, the President of Urenco, USA. Urenco is the only domestically located, NRC-licensed facility to enrich uranium for commercial use. Ms. Mann brings a wealth of insight to this discussion on behalf of the U.S. nuclear supply chain industry.

Southern Nuclear has assumed the leadership mantle on behalf of utilities to assess and develop advanced nuclear reactor designs. Nick Irvin leads those efforts for Southern Company and offers a hands-on testimonial of the rigorous process underway across the country to seek regulatory approval for promising first-of-a-kind technologies.

I also welcome back Jeff Merrifield who has testified in this room many times going back to his tenure as an NRC Commissioner. He is now practicing law with a focus on advanced nuclear reactors and strategic counsel to energy companies. Jeff provides an abundance of experience to inform today's discussion.

There remains tremendous promise for American nuclear technology; and we can ensure that promise through legislative reforms, reflective of our committee priorities to put consumers first, advance innovation, protect national security, and spur competition. The four bills today align with those priorities.

I appreciate the bipartisan leadership from Members on this topic and look forward to moving these important bills forward.