

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Full Committee Hearing
“Department of Energy: Management and Priorities”
January 30, 2018

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here. Today, marks the first time we have had a Senate-confirmed witness from the Trump Administration testify before this Committee. While I am certainly pleased that we are holding this hearing, I am also disappointed that it has taken this long to exercise our Congressional oversight responsibilities with this new Administration, and that we have still not heard from Secretary Perry. I hope and trust that he will testify before the Committee once the DOE budget request is submitted to Congress.

Last year, I led an inquiry into the Department’s mismanagement of funds at ARPA-E. My letter to DOE on the issue in April 2017 asked Secretary Perry to resolve the issue. After receiving an unsatisfactory response from my former Governor, I asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate what appeared to be an illegal freezing of funds. In the process, DOE relented and released the ARPA-E funding for FY 2016.

But that wasn’t the end of it. GAO discovered that there was further mismanagement of funding for FY 2017. In December, GAO announced that in the process of their investigation, they discovered that DOE had committed an illegal impoundment of funding, which violated the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974. Prior to this, GAO had not found an Impoundment Control Act violation in more than a decade. Again, DOE relented and was forced to release the funds.

This example at ARPA-E highlights the critical role Congress and this Committee in particular play in ensuring taxpayer funds are well spent. While I know that neither of the witnesses before us today has direct authority over ARPA-E, I would like to challenge each of you to ensure this type of political interference and gross mismanagement of taxpayer funds does not occur under your watch for any of the programs you steward. I trust you will spend the appropriated funds as Congress directs, but I also encourage you to see to it that the science and research opportunities provide the ultimate roadmap for federal investments at our science agencies, not political platforms or partisan talking points.

I was more than pleased with the outstanding work of Secretary Moniz during his time leading the Department. His tireless efforts enabled numerous technological advancements and groundbreaking scientific research. He left the Department in an excellent position, including restructuring the senior leadership to more closely align with its statutory guidance to enhance the communication and coordination across the science and energy programs. This was accomplished by combining elements of the roles of the two under secretaries testifying before us today into one position, an Under Secretary for Science and Energy. This restructuring was well received in Congress and praised by the scientific community that works closely with DOE.

Unfortunately, as we have seen with many sound policy initiatives by the Obama Administration, the Trump Administration chose to largely erase Secretary Moniz's carefully considered work to improve management of the Department for no apparent reason other than to boast that they reversed another Obama Administration policy. I am puzzled by this move and hope we can get some clarification and justification today.

Before I conclude, I would like to again express my desire to see Secretary Perry in this hearing room to testify soon on the President's FY 2019 budget. As we all remember, the 2018 budget proposal was unhelpful and completely out of touch with the realities of the competition we face around the world in science and energy. It would send our science agencies backward and would harm harmed the excellent work stewarded by the Department of Energy. Yet this Committee held no hearings on that budget request. I hope this next budget will take a well-grounded, realistic approach to funding DOE's work – one that supports American innovation and secures our leadership in science and technology for years to come. If not then it will be dead on arrival as was last year's budget request.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.