

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

Full Committee Markup
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
H.R. 6398, The “Department of Energy Veterans’ Health Initiative Act”

Thank you, Chairman Smith, and good morning to everyone.

Today we are marking up the Department of Energy Veterans’ Health Initiative Act. This bill codifies actions that were proposed in the last budget request. The bill authorizes the Department of Energy (DOE) to conduct collaborative research with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in order to address complex, large data management challenges associated with veterans’ health care issues.

This bill also directs DOE to carry out a two-year research pilot program to advance research in artificial intelligence and data analytics for a broad range of potential applications. These are both worthy ideas, and I support both of these activities. For that reason, I will not oppose passage of this bill today. However, I think these worthy activities could have been better addressed by our Committee if we had been a little more thoughtful in drafting this legislation. When this bill was noticed for markup last Friday, the bill had still not been vetted by the VA or the Veterans Affairs Committee. Given that the bill is about veterans affairs, that seems like a big oversight. We are going to consider a Manager’s Amendment to address some of the concerns that we’ve now heard from them, but I understand that the VA has expressed concern about the bill in general.

Perhaps if we really wanted to help the veterans at the heart of this bill, we should have legislated with a little more care, because passing this bill out of Committee today doesn’t accomplish anything if the bill ends up dying at the Veterans Affairs Committee. I would note that this bill has already been referred to the Veterans Affairs Committee. So I think it is vitally important that we work collaboratively with them on this legislation as we move forward.

I yield back.