U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Full Committee Hearing:
An Update on the Department of Energy's Science and Technology Priorities

September 14, 2023

Good morning and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this very important hearing today. And thank you to Secretary Granholm for being here. As you know, the Science, Space, and Technology Committee has played a leading role in shaping our nation's energy policy through the last several Congresses. This includes major contributions to the CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the Energy Act of 2020 – which guided much of funding included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

As we focus on the implementation of the energy innovation provisions in each of these landmark bills, an area that I am particularly focused on is fusion energy, as the Members of this Committee and the Secretary know well by now. The need to significantly improve support for our U.S. fusion research enterprise is actually one of the major reasons that I first ran for Congress in 1994, and one of the top reasons that I decided to seek the Ranking Member position of this Committee after Chairwoman Johnson retired last year. This support is now strongly bipartisan, and it is also bicameral.

I am excited about the real breakthroughs we've seen in fusion over the last 2 years alone, including the monumental achievement of ignition at the National Ignition Facility late last year – which was followed by even more progress from NIF in the last few months. I'm also encouraged by the rapid growth we are now seeing in the private sector for fusion, and the major technical achievements that they are now bringing to our overall national effort.

And I am especially encouraged that Secretary Granholm and President Biden recognized this progress in their Budget Request for 2024, which includes over $1 billion for the Department of Energy's fusion energy research program, a 32% increase. Thank you, Madam Secretary. This proposal for fusion is a vast improvement over any previous budget request that I can recall in my time in Congress.

All that said, let us be clear. There is still a lot more work to do. This Committee has built a solid legislative framework that would ensure that the U.S. is the world leader in this potentially

transformational emerging industry through the bipartisan laws that I mentioned. And this Administration is now clearly ready to follow through on this direction. But if we don't translate this sizeable leap in support into actual appropriated funds *this year*, then our nation will have missed a major opportunity to meet this pivotal moment. And given the growing global competition that we're now seeing in the race to commercial fusion, I believe that we would all deeply regret that.

Unfortunately, neither the House nor the Senate Appropriations marks are currently where we need them to be to get this right. I am certainly disappointed with the topline levels they have proposed for fusion research, but the details matter quite a bit as well. Of particular note, the most recent Long Range Plan produced by the Fusion Energy Sciences Advisory Committee recommended substantially increasing support for materials and fusion nuclear science R&D and for public-private partnerships *under all fusion budget scenarios*. This would include the flat and modest growth scenarios that would be consistent with the total funding currently proposed by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for fusion. The Department's Budget Request closely followed these recommendations, proposing a well-justified increase in support for materials and fusion nuclear science R&D to $147.5 million in FY 2024, and an increase for DOE's milestone-based public private partnership program to $130 million.

However, the current House and Senate Appropriations marks both fall well short of those goals. So, unfortunately, our Congressional budget process right now is not recognizing the guidance provided by the fusion community, the Department of Energy, or by Congress itself in recent bipartisan, landmark legislation. At this critical juncture for the budding U.S. fusion industry, we need to make sure we are prioritizing our Federal investments to best ensure success.

That said, we still have a long way to go before a final budget gets to the President's desk, and this is no time to give up.

So I am doing everything in my power to make sure that going forward, our annual federal funding reflects this immense progress and the promise of fusion energy, and I invite everyone here to join me in this effort.

Thank you and I yield back.