

OPENING STATEMENT
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House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Energy Subcommittee Hearing
Advancing Solar Energy Technology: Research Trumps Deployment
December 13, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing. It has been several years since this Committee has held a hearing that closely examined solar energy research and development activities carried out by the Department of Energy. These years have been a very consequential time for this sector. We have seen the price of solar energy decrease dramatically, and solar deployment continues to grow here in the U.S. and around the world.

The Solar Energy Technologies Office within DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) has stewarded key research that has resulted in important innovations in the diverse commercial market for solar energy. Moreover, due in large part to investments enabled by the Loan Programs Office at DOE, the United States now has a vibrant and growing utility-scale solar industry.

In that regard, I would like to congratulate the scientists and researchers at the Department of Energy, the national laboratories, and their private sector partners that helped us achieve a key milestone in the SunShot Initiative. Just this past September, DOE announced that the program achieved the cost reduction goals for utility-scale solar three years early. These smart government investments have resulted in significant private sector investment here in the United States, which has led to a vibrant solar industry and well-paying jobs for Americans across the country.

Unfortunately, this Administration and some of my colleagues in Congress do not recognize the realities of this industry. If we do not invest, others will. In fact, our international competitors have been investing and will continue to prioritize solar technology development. China is clearly beating us at our own game. Meanwhile we are quibbling about whether the Federal government should invest in "late-stage research" or just "early-stage" activities, whatever that means, instead of supporting robust R&D investments across the innovation spectrum that will make the U.S. more competitive.

The Trump Administration's budget proposed major cuts to solar energy R&D, including a 66% cut from prior year funding for the solar energy technologies office within EERE. It also called for an outright elimination of the Loan Programs Office, which enabled the commercialization of several first-of-a-kind large-scale solar power projects.

Now, I am not going to tell you that every program the Department currently implements is perfect, that reforms should never be considered, or that reasonable people cannot simply disagree on the best way to allocate its resources even after a careful, rigorous review. One of my primary concerns now is that such a thoughtful review never actually took place before proposing these draconian cuts. In fact, Administration officials confirmed after they released the budget that there was no engagement with the private sector to determine what industry would be able or willing to fund in the absence of federal investment. That is simply unacceptable.

Defunding solar energy at DOE may be a nice political talking point for some, but when it comes to U.S. competitiveness and our economic growth, such a proposal is ill-advised and short-sighted. I am hoping we can have a productive dialogue today that will better inform us about the realities of this industry both here and around the world. We need to know what we have to lose before we go slashing the R&D budgets that are the lifeblood of our future economy.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.