

# Opening Statement of Ranking Member Randy Weber at Energy Subcommittee Hearing on ARPA-E

Feb 26, 2019

Opening Statement

Today, we will hear from a panel of experts on the status of the Department of Energy (DOE)'s Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy (ARPA-E) and discuss how Congress can effectively evaluate and reform this fundamental science program.

Created in 2007, DOE's ARPA-E program was modeled after the Department of Defense's DARPA program. The agency was intended to provide finite R&D funding for innovative projects that could have disruptive impact on critical American economic, environmental, national security, and energy sector challenges.

Specifically, ARPA-E was tasked by Congress to reduce reliance on foreign sources of energy and energy related emissions, and to improve energy efficiency in all economic sectors.

ARPA-E was intended to be unique among DOE's applied research programs. The agency aims to achieve its goals by funding the highest risk, highest reward fundamental science – the transformative research that industry will not pursue.

But today, it's unclear if ARPA-E remains true to this inspiring mission. While there are examples of truly groundbreaking research – like the project exploring unique fusion reactor designs – there are also a large number of programs that overlap with DOE's applied energy offices.

For example, today, ARPA-E has funding announcements or active programs supporting research in wind energy technologies, advanced nuclear technology, and energy storage systems for the electric grid – all areas of research that receive funding through other DOE programs.

Industry already has an interest in developing incremental improvements to today's energy technology. We can't afford to spend limited federal resources on duplicative, late-stage programs that compete with private sector investment.

Instead, we should refocus the ARPA-E program on its original purpose – taking fundamental science discoveries and applying them to our biggest technology challenges.

This approach could provide solutions across the Department's diverse mission space, including areas like nuclear waste management and national security.

With the agency's unique expertise, I believe this program is capable of supporting a new generation of scientific breakthroughs. But that won't happen without real reforms to prevent duplication and refocus ARPA-E on the greatest technology challenges.

We also can't just assume that big increases in spending will magically appear in the budget. If ARPA-E's budget is increased, we will inevitably have to make tough choices and cut spending elsewhere in the Department.

In preparation for this hearing, I thought about what breakthrough energy technologies look like – and I was reminded of how hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling revolutionized the global energy market. Research at our national labs laid the groundwork and American industry harnessed their discoveries to change the world.

We need to focus agencies like ARPA-E on applying DOE's basic science discoveries. With this approach, I believe that American industry can capitalize on that research and revolutionize the energy industry once again.

I want to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing today and the witnesses for providing their testimony, and I'm looking forward to a productive discussion about ARPA-E's future today.