COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Randy Weber

Energy Subcommittee Hearing

The Next Mile: Technology Pathways to Accelerate Sustainability within the Transportation Sector

September 18, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Lamb, for holding today's subcommittee hearing. I'm looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about innovative transportation technologies, and about DOE's research and development activities in these areas.

The U.S. transportation sector is a critical part of the U.S. economy. Annually, in the United States, vehicles transport 11 billion tons of freight, equal to $35 billion dollars in goods each day. Last year, almost one third of U.S. energy consumption was used for the transportation of people and goods across the country.

Currently, this massive energy need is met with petroleum products, which account for 92 percent of U.S. transportation energy use. It's clear that we will rely on this incredible resource long into the future – so we need to consider this reality as we seek to reduce emissions and grow other energy sources.

As energy demand increases, American researchers are exploring sustainable technologies that will make fossil fuel consumption cleaner and more efficient, introduce new fuel pathways, and maintain U.S. energy security.

Industry stakeholders are also prioritizing innovation, commercializing electric vehicles, biofuels, and advanced fuel cell technologies. And this afternoon, we'll hear from our some of our friends in these successful industries.

But although industry is taking advantage of incentives to reduce transportation sector emissions, the federal government still has a significant role to play in conducting fundamental research that will drive innovation in these technologies.

At the Department of Energy (DOE), sustainable transportation R&D is funded through the Department's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (or EERE) and carried out through its Vehicle, Bioenergy, and Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technologies Offices.

It bears repeating that EERE is by far DOE's largest applied research program. At almost $2.4 billion in annual funding, EERE is bigger today than the all of the Department's applied R&D programs combined.

And currently, the sustainable transportation portfolio makes up almost a third of EERE's budget.

Today's hearing also provides an opportunity for us to discuss potential vehicle technology legislation: H.R. 2170, the Vehicle Innovation Act of 2019. This bill would authorize modest growth in funding for DOE's vehicle research activities, supporting a broad range of research efforts to reduce or eliminate vehicle emissions and petroleum usage in the U.S.

And while it should come as no surprise that I don't agree with everything in this bill, I am pleased to see that my friends across the aisle are considering a more reasonable approach to funding authorization levels. So I look forward to the discussion on this bill moving forward.

I want to be clear that I support DOE funding for innovative research in transportation technologies. I'm also supportive of American industry taking the lead, and of the kind of basic research that benefits not just transportation, but all energy technologies.

As we all know, the majority of that basic research is carried out in our national labs. So I'm pleased that we will hear from two DOE labs today about how American researchers are leveraging DOE's unique and unparalleled user facilities to drive innovation in transportation technologies.

For example, at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, researchers have access to not only the National Transportation Research Center (NTRC) the nation's only transportation focused user facility, but also the lab's Spallation Neutron Source, Center for Nanophase Materials Sciences, and the Oak Ridge Leadership Computing Facility – which currently houses the world's most powerful supercomputer.

When it comes to vehicle technology research, we need to look at the big picture and take the long term approach. Industry simply cannot conduct the fundamental research needed for the next technology breakthrough. But industry can get these technologies out on the road.

By prioritizing basic research capabilities and user facilities that have broad applications, we can still enable the private sector to bring innovative new transportation technologies to the market, while advancing science and innovation across the American economy.

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