



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Randy Weber

Energy Subcommittee Hearing – Bioenergy Research and Development for the Fuels and Chemicals of Tomorrow

March 16, 2022

Thank you, Mr. Casten, for filling in for Chairman Bowman and running what is our first hybrid hearing in about a year. I'm glad to see some faces here in person!

Today we will examine a promising clean energy technology area that should play a role in our all-of-the-above energy strategy. Bioenergy is a broad term that refers to the use of biomass and waste resources to produce energy and related products like biofuels and biogas.

The applications of bioenergy seem almost endless. From sustainable aviation fuel to recycling and waste-to-energy technologies, bioenergy has the potential to benefit not just the U.S energy sector but a variety of industries including manufacturing and agriculture.

The Department of Energy (DOE) has led the way in driving U.S. innovation in bioenergy technologies, but, like most technologies we talk about here at the Science Committee, there is still work to be done and progress to be made. While some biofuels like ethanol are mature energy sources, we have just scratched the surface of what is possible when it comes to new, more efficient, advanced biofuels and bio-products. That is what today's hearing is about: the next generation of bioenergy R&D.

Along with Chairwoman Johnson, Ranking Member Lucas, and Chairman Bowman, I was proud to lead the *DOE Science for the Future Act* and see it pass on an overwhelming bipartisan vote on the House Floor last summer. This bill contained a comprehensive reauthorization of DOE's Biological and Environmental Research program, which conducts early-stage research to advance our ability to use biological systems for energy technology.

This reauthorization is absolutely necessary for the success and commercialization of next-generation bioenergy technologies. Without support and updates to BER's basic research mission, and facilities like the Bioenergy Research Centers, we could be stuck with the same conventional biofuels and bioproducts that may never be cost effective or widely adopted. The updated language in our bill provides guidance to DOE's activities

and modernizes their research focus to align with current capabilities, needs, and demands.

DOE also conducts bioenergy research, development, and demonstration activities through its Bioenergy Technologies Office (BETO), which is housed within the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) Office. While this office is focused more on mature technologies and their commercialization, it plays a valuable role in the full research and development cycle.

BER and the Office of Science target the most fundamental, industry-shifting breakthroughs with basic research, but BETO and EERE can then help to take those breakthroughs and apply them to a technology suitable for widespread deployment. But as my colleagues have heard me say often, applied energy research on the government's dime has its limits.

There are times when help for demonstration and commercial application makes sense, but the federal government has no business picking the winners and losers of the energy market. Therefore, there comes a time when every technology, bioenergy included, should be taken off government support and allowed to either flourish or flounder through the free market.

So while I support much of the work of BETO and EERE, I don't want my words to be misconstrued as an open invitation to expand these programs irresponsibly. I believe we should start with robust funding and support for the Office of Science and then allow EERE to capitalize on their most promising breakthroughs in partnership with the private sector.

I look forward to today's hearing and learning how this basic research to commercialization cycle for bioenergy can be streamlined and improved. We have a diverse panel here with witnesses from a National Lab, a DOE Bioenergy Research Center, academia, and the private sector. Between all of them, I'm sure we will hear about a bright future with bioenergy.

I want to thank each of them for testifying today. And I yield back the balance of my time.